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INQUIRY

INTO THE

COMPARATIVE MORAL TENDENCY

OF

TRINITARIAN AND UNITARIAN

DOCTRINES;

IN A

SERIES OF LETTERS TO THE REV. DR. MILLER,

OF PRINCETON.

By JARED SPARKS.

How great soever may be the pretence of good will, and charity, and concern for the salvation of men's souls, men cannot be forced to be saved, whether they will or no; and, therefore, when all is done, they must be left to their own consciences.—LOCKE.

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PREFACE.

THE present work contains a series of Letters originally published in the Unitarian Miscellany. They are here brought together with many important additions and alterations. The circumstances under which they first appeared may be briefly stated as follows.

In a Sermon, preached by the Rev. Dr. Miller at the ordination of the Rev. Mr. Nevins in Baltimore, were introduced remarks on Unitarians, which were thought to be unreasonably severe and unjust. Strictures were made on these remarks, and published in the form of a letter to Dr. Miller. To these he replied with a view to explain and vindicate the objectionable parts of his Sermon. The third letter in the following *Inquiry*, entitled "Charges against the Character of Unitarians," is the one first addressed to him. All

those of the remainder, which were originally inserted in the *Miscellany*, relate more particularly to his *Reply*, and the topics which it embraces.

In preparing these letters for separate publication, the author deemed it advisable to omit some parts, to write others anew, to interweave occasional additions, and, by removing as far as possible local and personal allusions, to clothe them with a general interest, and cause them to harmonize in illustrating the point which he aims to discuss. The first and second letters, and some of the others, are wholly added.

The primary purpose of the author's undertaking has been, to trace out the influence of certain religious opinions on the character of the persons adopting them; and his ultimate object, to show that the sentiments usually denominated Unitarian have a decided preference in this respect to the high dogmas of orthodoxy. The discussion, in some of its parts, has taken a wide range, and been conducted, perhaps, in a somewhat desultory manner. This was in a measure ne-

cessary from the causes in which it originated. It is believed, however, that little will be found, which has not a general bearing on the subject.

The letters on Charity, and the Christian Name, may at first be thought an exception ; but when it is reflected how strong an influence the various sentiments indicated in these letters have on the temper and feelings of christians, it is presumed they will be allowed to hold an important place in connexion with other parts of the work.

The inquiry concerning the opinions of Newton, Locke, and Watts, might possibly have been spared, and yet it has a natural alliance with the succeeding letter on the morals of celebrated English Unitarians. On the whole, it is hoped, that most readers will find it no difficult task to discover sufficient harmony and directness in all the essential particulars brought under examination.

It has been no part of the author's plan to investigate the truth of opinions, nor has he approached this branch of inquiry any farther,

than was requisite for defining articles of faith explicitly and fairly. To accomplish this, it was sometimes necessary, as in the case of the Trinity and Atonement, to compare different views, and bring forward some of the reasons by which they are severally supported. But the chain of argument is never meant to be directed to this end ; its ultimate bearing is exclusively on the tendency of existing opinions, as they affect piety and morals.

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AN

INQUIRY

INTO THE

COMPARATIVE MORAL TENDENCY OF

TRINITARIAN AND UNITARIAN DOCTRINES.

PART I.

CHARGES AGAINST UNITARIANS.

LETTER I.

*Value and Objects of Controversy in advancing Truth
and Practical Religion.*

SIR,

THE advantages of controversy in promoting religious truth, and practical goodness, have been variously estimated. Some persons have imagined, that the mischief is greater than the benefit, and that piety loses more than truth gains. It was a saying of Dr. Young, that “the dispute about religion, and the practice of it, seldom go together.” In a limited sense this may be true; but in no sense does it

afford an argument against the use of controversy, nor any proof of its inutility. The fault is not in the dispute, but in the manner of the dispute; not in the nature or tendency of controversy, but in the temper of the persons concerned.

No one needs be made worse by having his opinions opposed; if they are false, the quicker they are confuted and abandoned the better. And how can their truth be established, if never questioned? Every man may add to his wickedness by suffering his passions to gain the mastery over his reason; but no one can be in the way of danger, who is induced to examine the foundation of his opinions, give up his errors, and thus cling more closely to truth, as every man will do, who makes a right use of controversy.

If it appears, that controveſtists themselves are less improved than they ought to be, by a mutual investigation of religious subjects; if, as in the time of Austin, *tempeſtate contentionis, serenitas charitatis obnubilatur*, in the tempeſt of contention they suffer the serenity of charity to be obscured; if they too often substitute loud talk for plain facts, and vain declamation for sound argument; the public will nevertheless derive an advantage. Nothing is so much to be dreaded in religion, as ignorance and apathy. Faith will have no value, and the commands of God no power, where there is not intelligence to direct, and energy to execute.

Credulity, superstition, bigotry, prejudice, may grow up in the desert soil of a prescribed and unex-

plored faith ; they may flourish there in sickly luxuriance, till they overshadow every generous virtue and pious sentiment. But if you would see the christian character in its excellence and strength, you must rouse every faculty, and bring into united action the best powers, principles, and affections of the human mind. The best mode, if not the only mode, of creating a desire of knowledge, a fondness for studying the Scriptures, and a wakeful spirit of inquiry, is to engage in amicable discussions of such doctrines, as are differently understood, by persons equally zealous for the cause of pure religion, and earnest in the search of truth.

Whoever will go back to the origin of christianity, and follow its progress down to the present time, will do little else, than read a continued history of religious controversy. Much the largest part of our Saviour's teaching was employed in controverting the opinions of his adversaries. He argued with the Jews, exposed their false interpretations of the law, met their objections, and confuted their reasonings.

The Apostles were controveirtists ; they preached to convince the world of errors, to eradicate deep impressions, to pull down an old religion and set up a new one. They were assailed by Jews and Gentiles, the learned and the unlearned, the wise and the simple, the powerful and the weak. They maintained themselves against all parties, and every where "contended earnestly for the faith which was once delivered to the saints." They combated the enormities of heathen idolatry ; they attacked

the prejudices of the Jews, proved the nullity of their burdensome ritual, and the fulfilment of their prophecies in the coming of the Messiah. Such were the labours of the Apostles, and they were all performed in the field of controversy.

The same process was continued for three centuries afterwards. The christian scheme was attacked by many learned men, and defended by as many others. Preachers were still raising the banner of controversy, and by argument and persuasion making new converts. At length councils were convened, and the fiery spirits of a few ambitious men, kindled by the love of temporal power and worldly glory, did much to retard the progress and mar the purity of the christian doctrines. But these doings ought not to be dignified with the name of controversy. They were furious contests stirred up by motives of secular concernment, in which no one appears to have cared for truth or religion. Articles of faith were debated, or not debated, as the case might be, and then decided by a plurality of voices. Creeds were made by acclamation, and that was declared to be a sound doctrine, which comported with the selfish views of the ruling party. Religion suffered by these contentions, which were equally an outrage on good sense and correct principle, yet no doubt some good was done. A new impulse was given to inquiry, and the knowledge of christianity was extended.

The time at length came when controversy nearly ceased. And what was religion then? The history

of a benighted world for ten centuries will tell ; the black records of the Inquisition will tell ; and so will the bloody traces of a spiritual tyranny, and wicked persecution. Piety was no more ; it had degenerated into a set of outward, slavish, unmeaning ceremonies. Truth was no more ; it was lost amidst the barbarous jargon of a false philosophy, and a more false theology. The Scriptures were virtually no more ; they were concealed from the public eye and forgotten. Religion was no more in its original brightness and purity ; it was built on another foundation ; it was literally a human invention, a fiction of popes, and councils, and priests. The world submitted to the imposition and was satisfied with the counterfeit. Inquiry was no more ; the powers of intellect were benumbed, reason dethroned, and the moral sense depraved. No energy was left for thought or action, no light to guide, no principles to enoble, no spirit to animate. You look back on a melancholy scene of ignorance, stupidity, oppression, servitude, darkness, and death.*

The Reformation broke the spell, and then controversy revived. The early Reformers, with the

*There was logomachy enough, it is true, in the darkest periods of the church, but it was a battle of words fought about shadows. The long war between the Dominicans and Franciscans concerning the merits of their tutelar doctors, Thomas and Scotus, was of this sort. They contended warmly and bitterly in the region of dreams and fiction, but they rarely came down to the humble sphere of common sense and rational discussion. Years were spent and volumes written on the nature of the divine co-operation with the will of man, and on the unity of form in man. Nay, the subtle dispute about universal ideas, or the solution of the famous question, whether universal ideas belonged to the class of objects, or of mere names, bewildered the most erudite doctors,

vehement Luther and the mild Melancthon at their head, contended, like the Apostles of old, for a better faith. They waged war against error, and with the strong forces of reason and argument, a righteous zeal and firm purpose, they were victorious. It was a time of storms, but the threatening elements were calmed, and a bright day succeeded. The beams of a more glorious sun shone on the world, and warmed into life, and quickened into action, the springs of intellect, the religious principle, the consciousness of moral power and moral accountability. The Scriptures were rescued from their long imprisonment. Christians began to think, inquire, examine, discuss. These were great acquisitions to the christian cause, and they were gained by force; they were the fruits of controversy, the rewards of an independent assertion, and manly defence of right and liberty.

From the beginning of the Reformation to the present day, controversy has prevailed among protestants; sometimes with too much violence, and to a very unjustifiable extreme, it must be allowed, but never without profit. It is the chief corner stone of every sect in Christendom. Luther and Calvin were controvertists; and so were the Dutch divines and early French protestants; so were Latimer and Cranmer; so were Wickliffe and Knox; Robert Bar-

and kept up perpetual hostilities between the Nominalists and Realists for centuries. It would be a perversion of language to call these contentions religious controversy, from which christians could be expected to derive knowledge or wisdom.

clay and John Wesley; and so is every man, who has a mind of his own. While the liberty of thought and speech remains, while christians are mortal and fallible, controversy will never cease, and it would be an injury to religion if it should. If there be any chance of truth in this world of uncertainty, it must be from the collision of opinion. Accidental harmony of thought, and sentiment, and motive, and design, among any number of men, is not to be expected; it is not consistent with the laws of human nature. It is only by comparison and discussion, that we can hope to approximate a uniformity of opinion, especially on subjects in themselves obscure and intricate.*

Every individual has separate interests and views. The social principle unites some; similarity of habits, and affinity of religious belief, unite others. But when the best is done, there will and must be divisions. These are apt to provoke the passions; they are unfriendly to charity; they sometimes trouble the fountains and obstruct the channels of kind feeling and forbearance. Such are the evils of sects and parties in religion, and deplorable indeed would they be, if the good did not, after all, greatly pre-

* The benefits of controversy are well expressed in the following words of Dr. Lardner. "Its effects will be," he observes, "that we shall all better understand our Bible. Possibly some errors may be mixed with our faith, which, by this means, may be separated, and our faith become more pure. Being more confirmed in the truth of our religion, we shall be more perfect in the duties of it. Instead of being unthinking and nominal, we shall become more generally serious and real christians." Such cannot fail to be the good effects of religious controversy, when properly conducted.

ponderate. The differences of party are themselves productive of good; more opportunities are offered for practising the christian virtues, trying the character, and proving our sincerity, than we could possibly have, if all were of one mind and one purpose. Each party is compelled, by the watchfulness of others, to be more cautious in belief, and circumspect in practice; more inquisitive after knowledge, and zealous in good works.

There is one class of christians only to whom controversy, or religious enquiry and discussion, can be of no service. Those persons who have bound themselves to a written system of faith, in the shape of a creed or confession, which they are resolved never to forsake, or which they engage by a solemn covenant always to support, as in the case of many clergymen, church members, and professors in theological institutions; such persons cannot possibly expect or hope to gain any thing by examining their opinions, and comparing them with those of others, and with the standard of the Scriptures. To change a single sentiment would be a violation of their covenant, and a crime. What conscientious man will allow the suspicion to enter his mind, that any thing can be wrong in a faith, which, in the most solemn manner, he has pledged his veracity and conscience to cherish and support? He may defend his adopted creed, and rally round the system to which he is chained, with all the aids in his power, but he cannot go a step further. He cannot open his mind to a new truth, nor suffer himself to concede, that an

opponent's argument can have any weight, or his opinions any claim to respect. This would be to distrust the grounds of his own faith, and to betray the guilt of doubting, where he has made a sacred engagement never to doubt. What advantage can a person, thus cramped and bound, derive from an examination of religious subjects? The public may be benefited by knowing his sentiments, and his mode of explaining and defending them; but, as for himself, his journey will be a circle; he will end where he began.

The subjects of religious controversy may be arranged under three general topics; *first*, the nature of a christian church and the modes of worship; *secondly*, the truth of doctrines as articles of faith; *thirdly*, the influence of belief on practice. A few remarks on these respectively, will show us how the charges against Unitarians stand in regard to each, and prepare us for our future inquiries.

The *first* of these topics embraces all inquiries, which pertain to the foundation, characteristics, history, government, and discipline of the church; to the authority of the church, or any number of men calling themselves the church, in matters of faith; to modes of worship; to external forms and ceremonies. In Protestant countries, this branch of controversy seems nearly to be exhausted. It was long ago settled in theory by Chillingworth, and Barrow, and Tillotson; and the spirit of modern times is bringing the theory into practice. If there are yet some contenders for tradition, some who think the

Protestant cause is not sufficiently supported by the Bible, but needs the props of fathers and councils, their number is small, and their share in the sympathy of the christian public at large proportionably feeble. It is a fundamental principle of Protestantism, that christians may think and decide for themselves, and it is now generally agreed, that they may differ on most of the particulars, which fall under this head of controversy, without forfeiting their title to a good character, or christian privileges. Which system of church government, or plan of discipline, or mode of worship, is the best, may never be determined to the satisfaction of all parties; nor is it necessary, while it is agreed, that every system and mode, approved and followed by serious christians, is consistent with a pure religion and holiness of conduct.

To this first part of controversy, the charges against Unitarians have seldom extended in any distinct or exclusive form. Their views are much the same as those of many christians of other denominations. They maintain the unlimited freedom of thought and judgment to be a first principle, not only of religion, but of human nature. They believe in the truth and divinity of the christian religion from the same testimony as others, and among their numbers may be reckoned several of the ablest defenders of christianity against the scruples of doubt, and the cavils of infidelity. And in regard to the nature of a church, the qualifications and authority of ministers, forms of worship, and other things of this description, they do

not discover, that Christ has left any positive commands, or that he has established any one system as preferable to all others, and necessary to be adopted by his true followers, as essential to salvation. The religion of Jesus was intended to be universal ; and, in regard to its forms, there seems to be a wise adaptation to the conditions and circumstances of men in the world, to their customs, manners, organization of society, and their political and civil institutions. Unitarians hold, that it should be the chief endeavour to be sincere and faithful worshippers, after such a manner as every individual shall in his conscience believe agreeable to the word and spirit of the Gospel. Any number of christians may unite in adopting such forms as they please, and their offering will be accepted, while they seriously strive to worship God in the purity of holiness, and to walk in the footsteps of Christ.

The *second* topic of religious controversy includes what are usually called articles of faith. It looks not so much to demonstrable facts, as to reasonings from facts, and is less concerned in telling men what to do, than what to think. The theatre of controversy, to which this topic opens, is boundless. It has been traversed in every direction, but has never been compassed, and never will be, while the powers of mind are so various, and the force of evidence is so unequally felt ; while the imagination is so fertile, and the lights and shadows of truth and error are so intimately blended in the objects of human thought and inquiry.

It can never be expected, that all men will have the same conceptions of the abstruse points of religion, any more than of other things less difficult, of philosophy, science, arts, principles of taste, the causes of natural phenomena, and the designs of providence. Controversy has not been useless on the doctrinal parts of religion, although it has brought to light much less sound knowledge, than the friends of a practical faith could desire. Fancy has set no bounds to her excursions, but she has often delighted more in the desert wastes of ideal speculation, than in the fertile and productive regions of reality and plain sense. The technics of a school divinity, and the subtleties of an artificial logic, contrivances well devised for making darkness more dark, and dulness more dull, have too often spread mysteries around truth, and conducted the inquirer into a maze from which no human sagacity could extricate him, and where no refuge was left but to submit to his fate.

It is happy, that these pompous trifles are nearly abandoned. Their influence remains, but it is fast disappearing. Reason is assuming its just controul, common sense is throwing off the fetters of delusion, and human nature itself is restless under the thraldom, which ignorance, and fanaticism, and folly have imposed on it. Theology and the sciences, a knowledge of God and of his works, have gone hand in hand; one has smoothed the way for the other, and the progress of each is a test of the gaining power of intellect over sense, reality over fiction, freedom over servitude, and piety over a visionary enthusiasm.

The seventeen ponderous volumes of the seraphic doctor, Aquinas, with his learned reveries and mystical refinements, and the twelve folios of his great antagonist, Duns Scotus, now rest undisturbed by the side of the scarcely less weighty lumber of Lully and Paracelsus, filled with grave dissertations on the philosopher's stone, elixirs of life, horoscopes, and planetary correspondences. They are now equally forgotten, or remembered only as proofs of the degraded condition of the human mind in the times of which they were considered the ornament and the boast.

Credulity was the spring of a barbarous philosophy in science, and of an irrational faith in religion. Controversy revived a wakeful distrust; inquiry and truth followed. Articles were examined; imposture was detected; the Scriptures were honoured and brought into use; the understanding was consulted; a process was commenced, which has continued for three hundred years, and is still going on with increased effect. Much rubbish has been removed; much more remains; long creeds have been shortened; they are daily becoming shorter, and it is no vain hope, perhaps, that they may at some future period, be made to approximate the measure and stature of the Scriptures. Free and friendly discussion will hasten the time. Even then christians will have different opinions. So let it be; there is no help for it, nor evil in it. Let them still discuss, and be friends and brethren; let them rejoice, that something is left to employ their powers, try their faith, exercise

their charity, and give an ample scope to their best virtues.

As Unitarians differ from those, who call themselves orthodox, chiefly in points of doctrine, they have been compelled to engage much in this department of controversy. Charges of heresy, unbelief, denying the Saviour, and perverting the Scriptures, have been poured out upon them with a confidence and self-sufficiency, that bear few marks of the humility inculcated in the Gospel. They have defended themselves, as God has given them strength, against the prejudices of sectarism, the asperity of intolerance, the pretensions of the self-righteous, the subtleties of the ingenious, the arguments of the candid, and the sober objections of the sincere and well informed. They have claimed the privilege of obeying conscience, and of relying on the Scriptures for the truth of their opinions. Yet the same charges continue to be reiterated. When the arguments of Unitarians cannot be confuted, the next step is to question their motives; when such opinions as they openly profess are found impregnable, it is charitably insinuated, that others are concealed, which they dare not publish; when reason proves a feeble or treacherous ally, it is thought honourable to employ the pioneers of censure and reproach. Argument goes out supported by recrimination, and where one fails to produce conviction, the other may succeed to rivet a prejudice. But these are abuses of controversy, which must gradually disappear. The spirit of the times will not long tolerate them; liberty and

reason will be heard, justice and truth will be respected.

The *third* general topic of religious controversy which relates to the influence of opinion on practice, or the efficacy of belief on the conduct of christians, has been much less tried than either of the two preceding. It has never been pursued with much method, nor to any great extent. Luther and the first Reformers brought it into the affair of indulgencies, works of supererogation, and perhaps some two or three other articles of the Catholic faith. But it has not been so usual to combat error with its tendency and consequences, as with the weapons afforded by first principles and established facts. The doctrines of election, and reprobation, of total depravity and imputed righteousness, have been sometimes examined in regard to their moral tendency by the Arminians, and others opposed to the Calvinistic dogmas; yet the endless controversies about these doctrines have been concerned almost wholly with their foundation and reality.

It was not till less than thirty years ago, that a formal attack was made on any sect of christians, as entertaining an entire system of belief unfriendly to morals, and destructive of piety. Mr. Andrew Fuller was the first, it is believed, who thought it his duty to descend to this ungracious task, in his indiscriminate assault on Unitarians. His book was not without ability, nor more remarkable for the author's talent at popular declamation, than for his limited acquaintance with the grounds of the Unitarian belief, and his unguarded assertions; for his as-

sumption of facts, which never existed, and his deduction of consequences, which never could follow.

The argumentative part of this work, which, indeed, was a very small part of the whole, was confuted in two short treatises, one by Dr. Toulmin, and the other by Mr. Kentish. To the declamation, rhapsody, and rashness, no reply was made, as none was necessary. The subject has been more recently touched in an eloquent sermon by Mr. Fox, but without any direct bearing on the controversy at large.

In this country you are the first person, it is presumed, who has imitated the example of Mr. Fuller. You have taken up the subject on the same grounds, and pursued it in nearly the same track. Starting with similar positions, you make similar inferences, in both of which I think you are under mistake. I believe you err in supposing Unitarianism to be the fountain of all evil, and Calvinism of all good. My reasons will appear in the sequel.

By maintaining, that Unitarians are not christians, that their religious faith is false, and that it sanctions and encourages a wicked life, you have done as much as could be done to compel them to speak in their defence. He would be strangely indifferent to the value of his own character, as well as of his religion, who should be reluctant to defend himself against such charges. The controversy, it is true, carries with it somewhat of an invidious aspect. It is no pleasant duty to search out the weaknesses of our brethren, nor to show how imperfectly their professions agree with their practice; and much less to

look around and select a few persons, whom, with ourselves, we pronounce to be more holy than others.

To prove, that any system of faith has a bad tendency is much the same as proving, that he who receives it is bad in consequence of his faith. And who would delight in such a work? We may hence learn, that, in this discussion, principles should be kept as distinct as possible from men, and that whatever may be proved to be the tendency of any doctrine, its actual effects should not be estimated except in connexion with other doctrines, and the peculiar circumstances of every person, who is judged by his opinions.

My chief purpose will be to make it manifest, that the faith and morals of Unitarians are not worthy of the odium, which your charges were calculated, and, as far as appears, designed to cast on them. The best manner of prosecuting this purpose undoubtedly is, to compare these with the faith and morals of Calvinists, or of other christians, at the same time that we apply the strength of argument to abstract principles. The subject naturally appeals to such a comparison, as the question is not, which party is perfect, but which is the most defective in consequence of its faith, and whether any one is to be pointed at, and denounced, and condemned, by all the rest.

An investigation of this sort, conducted with a proper spirit, cannot fail to terminate in beneficial results. How far the following treatise will bear

this character, must be left for those to decide, who are willing to read with candour, and judge by the christian rules of forbearance and charity. It is hoped, that nothing will be found inconsistent with a due respect for the serious opinions of every christian, nor with the liberty and independence with which every one ought to assert and defend his own sentiments. But on this point it would not be safe to promise much. All experience has proved, that theological zeal is not contented with the sober standard of wisdom and moderation. It sometimes burns with a scorching flame, rather than with a mild light and gentle warmth. To say, that this zeal shall always be subdued to a just temperament, would be presumptuous in one, who makes no pretensions to infallibility, nor claims any exemption from the infirmities of human nature. In executing the task before us, no other qualifications are held out, and no other exertions pledged, than such as flow from a love of truth, sincere motives, good intentions, and a warm interest in the subject.

I may at last fail to convince you, that your charges are incorrect and misapplied; I may not succeed in making it clear to your understanding, that they, who build their highest hopes on the Gospel, and the divine character of Christ, are christians, and are to be treated as christians; but, should I be thus unsuccessful, I shall not think my labour unprofitably bestowed in defending what I deem to be the truth of the Gospel, in rescuing my religious belief from ungenerous imputations, in doing justice to the

character of many good men, and in pleading the cause of rational piety, religious liberty, toleration, and charity.

The course which the nature of the subject requires me to pursue, comes wholly within the third division of controversy. The *truth of opinions* will be no farther brought into notice, than is necessary to state them fairly. Nevertheless, the ultimate object of all honest inquiry is truth. This is an eternal and unchangeable reality, essentially good in itself, and salutary in its influence. When we arrive at truth, we are at the end of our journey ; and if all the doctrines of faith, and positions in morals, could be demonstrated to be absolutely true, it would be an idle waste of time to look after their consequences. But since we know, that such a demonstration is not always possible, and that a chain of proofs, which carries conviction to one mind, frequently communicates no impressions to another, it is allowable to try different methods of investigation, and to turn our inquiries into any channels, which will conduct us to the main object.

As a general rule, it is much easier to judge between good and evil, than truth and error. We can with more confidence say, that a man's conduct is bad, than that his faith is false ; and hence we cannot always affirm, that his creed is true or false in proportion to his good or evil deeds. Many faithful christians, no doubt, have occasion to lament numerous defects of duty, which they would be unwilling to have charged to their unbelief. It cannot be

denied, however, that there is a close connexion between faith and practice. A man will act according to his convictions, and an irreligious practice can never be the consequence of a right faith. So far as such a practice depends on faith at all, it will be a faith in error, for truth is the parent of good. The conclusion is obvious, that we can refer no man's conduct, either good or bad, to his faith, unless we can prove such a connexion between them, that one will necessarily proceed, or does actually proceed, from the other; and, moreover, that no one's creed is to be set down as false, merely because he does not act as he professes to believe. By analogy, reason, argument, deduction, and other methods, we may show the evil tendency of an opinion, and its natural consequences; but when we come to conduct and character, we must be guided by definite principles, speak from facts, and judge with charity.

LETTER II.

Causes of Divisions and Discords among Christians.

SIR,

IT is a common and just remark, that the religion of the Gospel acts with less power on the hearts and lives of its professors, than its divine nature and purifying tendency warrant us to expect. This truth is not more the exultation of the unbeliever, than the humiliating confession of the sincere disciple of Jesus. What all acknowledge, the faithful cannot but lament, that the authority of religion is comparatively so little respected, and its influence so feebly felt, even among christians, who believe themselves sound in doctrine, and exemplary in practice. Some, it may be, are better than their principles; many, it is certain, are worse; and none are so good as not to discover many sad deficiencies, when they compare their own character with the example and requisitions of Christ.

Many causes, no doubt, which are common to all christians, conspire to bring about this imperfect discharge of religious duty. They may often grow out of circumstances peculiar to individuals, out of a course of unexpected events, local connexions, temporary hopes and fears, natural disposition, temperament, habit. There is, however, one source, deep

and broad, in which all the others are swallowed up. It is the *spirit of division and discord*, which has reigned with so absolute a controul in the hearts of christians during all periods of the church. To this single cause you may refer much the largest portion of evils, which have afflicted the christian world.

That these ill consequences should have followed the first attempts to promulgate the Gospel, is not surprizing. The doctrines preached by the Apostles were at that time in the highest degree heterodox in the eyes of all mankind ; they opposed established opinions and habits ; they aimed a destroying blow at religions and superstitions, which had not only become venerable by their antiquity, but cherished till they were believed to be true and sacred. Prejudice was arrayed against them ; the interests of men cried out that they were an innovation, and must be resisted ; the wisdom of the world proclaimed them a novelty, better calculated to delude than instruct the people ; human policy proscribed them as dangerous intruders on ancient forms, which ought to be censured by the friends of order, and suppressed by the arm of power. In this state of things, it could not be supposed, that the religion of Jesus would make its way without many struggles against opposition, or that men would quietly suffer principles to gain ground, in which they saw the ruin of their temporal interests and influence. It is easy to connect with these causes, the violence and malignity, the persecutions and cruelties, which the first christians experienced from every quarter.

When we come down a few centuries lower, and behold the religion of the Gospel seated on the thrones of emperors and kings, and uttering the voice of authority and power, we have a right to be prepared for better things. From a religion, the first principles of which inculcate peace, and good will, and charity, we are fully authorized to look for harmony, humanity, and kindness. Was this actually the result? Far from it. Scenes of strife and contention were acted over among christians themselves, darker and more dreadful, if possible, than any to which the ignorance and ferociousness of heathenism had given countenance. "It is a question," says Hoadly, "whether more unkindness and inhumanity, more malice and hatred, more violence and barbarity, have been shown by heathens and infidels towards christians for the sake of their religion, than have been shown by christians towards one another on the score of some religious differences."* The annals of religious persecution are the records of human misery. How many have been deprived of their rights, their freedom, and possessions; how many have sunk under the bloody rod of tyranny, been torn from their friends, and banished from their native country; how many have been buried in dungeons, condemned as criminals, tortured, and burnt, merely because they could not force their conscience and understanding to receive the notions, which chanced to run through the minds of their deluded and inhuman persecutors.

* Hoadly's Works, vol. I. p. 35.

Let us take one step more, and descend to our own times. We have no persecutions now with blood, and sword, and fire; no racks, nor dungeons, nor gibbets; but we have divisions enough; we have heart burnings, and evil speaking, tumults, dissensions, animosities, violence; we have a plentiful vocabulary of hard names, choicely selected and liberally applied to kindle the passions, provoke ill nature, raise high the voice of contention, and make broad the line of separation between christian brethren; we have abundance of the spirit of party, the pride of self-consequence, appellations of reproach, denunciations, anathemas, charges of heresy, and consigning to perdition.

In short, christians have the same heats of zeal, the same uncharitableness, the same propensity to undervalue the merits and misconstrue the intentions of others, the same over-weaning confidence in their own opinions, and horror at the opinions of those differing from them, the same exclusive temper, and the same disposition to confine the limits of salvation to the circle of their own walks, as they had twelve centuries ago. The gradual increase of intelligence, and of respect for human rights and liberty, has modified the action of these causes, and made their effects more mild; yet the seeds of discord still take root, and produce a vigorous growth. Divisions, on grounds merely of opinion and speculation, are at this day formidable obstacles to the peace and charity, harmony and mutual forbearance, which the Gospel in its true spirit both requires, and is eminently qualified to establish.

Now if we choose to search for the origin of these perversions, it will be clearly discovered *in the fondness, which a great majority of christians have manifested, for taking on themselves the guardianship of other people's consciences and faith.* They have shown an extreme solicitude to make all persons think and believe like themselves, and, to bring this to pass, have deemed it a pious and charitable act to set at nought the rights of conscience, to silence reason, and demand implicit submission. Hence Christendom has been deluged with creeds, and confessions, and symbols, and articles, till the plain believer, who supposed the words of Jesus Christ and the Apostles to be the only true symbols of a christian's faith, has been confounded amidst such a labyrinth of contradictions. But the amazement and confusion of believers have been among the least mischiefs of these strange devices. Tyrants and the abettors of faction, as well ecclesiastical as political, have found them potent engines in cramping the human mind, and pressing it into the vilest compliances. Once rivet the fetters of superstition, and hang out the signal of sanctity, and there will be no want of numbers to rally round the standard, and engage with enthusiasm in any cause, which it may be the good pleasure of their leaders to pursue.

That such were the motives, which first suggested this unholy artifice of creed-making, is too notorious to require a comment. Was not the Nicene creed itself framed amidst the fiercest heats of feuds and faction? And when you read the history of the

church during the two or three succeeding centuries, those fruitful eras of human symbols, does the thought ever strike you, that the prominent actors had the honour of religion at heart, or once dreamt of setting up the laws of Gospel charity, peace, humility, and piety ? No, you behold a scene of scandalous warfare, and creeds marshalled against creeds, not to enforce the truth or practice of religion, but to express personal antipathy, to cast reproach on a minority, or to anathematize an enemy. The good Fathers at the council of Ephesus even “ pronounced an anathema on all those, that should add any thing to the creed of Constantinople,” hereby commencing a quarrel, not only with such as then differed from them, but with all that ever should differ. Creeds were the watch-words of party ; they were fire-brands thrown among the multitude to keep alive the flame of passion and madness. They afforded inexhaustible materials for strife and discord, and those materials were not used with a sparing or unskilful hand by the persons, who had collected them and knew their value.

To this single practice, so early commenced, of assuming power over the faith and opinions of men, and of attempting to controul them in things in which it was impossible that they should be controlled, you may refer, with a precision almost demonstrative, the unhappy divisions among christians before the Reformation. It was not in the power of princes, popes, bishops, nor councils, to chain the thoughts. They might threaten, oppress, banish,

murder, as they did; but, they could do no more. Volumes of creeds, and anathemas without number, would not induce a man to believe what every principle in his nature revolted at. Using force would rouse his indignation, and make him burn with hatred and revenge; or, perhaps, it might drive him to be a hypocrite and deceiver. In either case he would be more wicked for his adopted creed. Take away restraint, command every one to think for himself, assure him of his freedom and personal responsibility, tell him to be guided by the Gospel, and his faith will then be sincere, he will believe and act like a christian.

These remarks prepare us for entering on the main subject of the present letter, which is to inquire into the occasion of religious differences among Protestants, and to ascertain the comparative agency, which orthodoxy and Unitarian sentiments have had in causing these differences, and in promoting the religious antipathy and dissensions, which have prevailed even from the time of Luther, and which are greatly to be lamented at the present day. The merits of the general inquiry on which we have entered hang with no inconsiderable weight on this point. Certain causes have had very extensive effects. To which system are these to be ascribed? Some of the leading principles, on which christian communities have been organized, and churches instituted, and discipline established, have tended to produce divisions, to create aversions, to clothe some men with a factitious authority, and to oppress and

irritate others. The party, which has embraced these principles, and put them in practice, is accountable for the consequences. By *principles* here, I do not mean any peculiar doctrines of religious faith, but the grounds assumed, and the steps taken, to promulgate these doctrines. In this respect, have the sentiments of Unitarians, or of the orthodox, been productive of the greatest degree of evil?

A few brief hints on the course pursued by the first Reformers and their immediate followers, or the motives by which they were influenced, and the objects at which they aimed, will place this subject in its proper light, and prove, if I mistake not, that the divisions and party violence, occasioned by differences of opinion, owe their origin to the very same causes since, as before the Reformation. *They will be found to have originated in building up systems of faith distinct from the Bible, and claiming authority to establish them as standards of sound doctrine, and tests of orthodoxy.* This was a foible with which the world seems to have been so much in love, that christians could not prevail on themselves to part with it, even while rebelling against its power, and deprecating its baleful tendency. In yielding to this weakness, they violated the fundamental principles of the Reformation, and created the elements of future disorder; and just in proportion as they ran to this extreme, they were opposed to the principles of Unitarianism. This will appear as we proceed.

The Reformation was started on the foundation of truth and reason. Two grand axioms were laid

down, as a basis on which the entire superstructure was to be erected, namely, *the right of private judgment* in all the concerns of religion, and *the sufficiency of the Scriptures* in qualifying believers for the attainment of salvation. It was justly asserted, that the rights of human nature give every man liberty, nay, require it of him as a duty, to use his best powers freely and independently in determining the manner in which he is to serve his Maker. And, again, it was maintained with equal cogency, that the Scriptures, which contain a revelation from God expressly designed for the moral improvement and final salvation of men, must in themselves be adequate to every purpose of instruction, concerning the principles of faith and the rules of action.

These axioms form the ground-work of a true scriptural theology. Let them be rigidly observed, and it will be impossible to fasten dangerous and entailed error on the mind, or to foment the elements of discord, or to multiply the tokens of perpetual altercation. Quarrels, and persecutions, and resentments, merely on account of differences in religious opinions, will cease, when you take away the charters for the defence of which the armour of sacred warfare is put on. Send all men to the Bible as the only charter of their faith, and you will place them on common ground, and bring them into a bond of union. They will not see every part of the Scriptures alike, but this variety of mental vision will be no obstruction to harmony, since it is allowed by the first laws of union, that every one shall judge of the

Scriptures according to the light and knowledge, which he possesses. It is the spirit of these axioms to permit Christians to differ in opinion, and yet bind them together as brethren.

Had the first Reformers been faithful to the principles, which they embraced at the outset with so much wisdom and intrepidity, the history of the Protestant church would wear an aspect very different from the one, which it now exhibits. But the trial was too much for their experience, if not for their firmness. They stumbled almost at the first step, and never recovered themselves afterwards. It was a notion of the Catholics, that a perfect unanimity of faith was absolutely necessary to constitute a true church; and an objection, which they urged with great warmth against the Protestants, was, that the liberty assumed by them would open a door to an infinite variety of opinions, and terminate in a dismemberment of the church, and the overthrow of Christianity itself.

Alarmed at these threatened consequences, and anxious to fortify themselves against the attacks of their opponents on this point, they gradually deserted their position, and became themselves deluded with the dream of a uniformity of faith. They were next driven to the severe task of devising some mode of establishing this uniformity, without destroying the fundamental axiom, which proclaimed it to be the duty of every Christian to think and judge for himself. This project was not more absurd, than im-

possible, and the attempt to put it in execution could only end in oppression, folly, and mischief.

The evil originated in false views of the thing called *unity of faith*. It was imagined to consist in a perfect uniformity of *opinion*, and the first effort was to make all persons yield assent to the same interpretation of the Scriptures. Luther, and his followers, maintained, that the Scriptures were the only rule of faith. This was consistent with the first principles of the Reformation. But they further contended, that there could be no true church without a perfect coincidence of opinion. This proposition was directly opposed to the other. To make the two hang together, it was discovered that the Scriptures had but *one sense*, and it was of course affirmed, that no one could be a true believer, who did not interpret them according to this sense. It soon came to pass, indeed, that they, who studied the Scriptures and believed them as their understanding and conscience required, were set down as heretics and ungodly men, not to be countenanced nor tolerated by the faithful.

Now, that there is such a thing as a *unity of faith* in the true christian church, no one, whether protestant or Catholic, can possibly doubt. But what is it? Not a unity of belief in human interpretations of Scripture, in articles constructed by wise men, or imposed by designing ones, or sanctioned by councils and convocations. What better would the world be, what would morality and religion gain, if all men should unite in believing the contradictions of the

Athanasian creed? How would it increase their piety or goodness to profess a unanimous belief, that the "Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Ghost is God, and yet there are not three Gods, but one God?" Or how would it add to their benevolence, humanity, and kind feelings to harmonize in the assent and declaration, that "whosoever does not keep this faith, whole and undefiled, without doubt he shall perish everlasting?" Or how would it help them along in the work of holy living to unite in the faith, that they are "utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite to all good, and wholly inclined to all evil," as the Confession of Faith assures us? Would men be more wise, virtuous, or holy by a unity in such dogmas as these? No. The same question may be asked, and the same answer returned, respecting a thousand other articles of human invention, scarcely less contradictory, or immoral in their tendency.

But there is a unity, which the Gospel commands, "a unity of the spirit in the bond of peace." Let this be established in the hearts of christians, and they will have no difficulty in coming together in the true scriptural unity of faith. Believe and practice what every one perceives to be plain, and believe it in the words, and practice it in the spirit, of the Gospel. There will then be a natural unity of faith in all the doctrines, which conspire to form the christian character; for these are truths of practical import, and appear in essentially the same light to every honest mind. Every attempt beyond this will

only drive men asunder, and destroy the unity, which the Scriptures, left to themselves, are calculated to produce; a unity of pious and virtuous action, of sympathy, benevolence, and affection, of love, charity, hope, and righteous intention. Nothing can be more mischievous, than the fancy, which many have taken up, that all the world must be uniform in believing what they choose to prescribe. We may safely affirm, that it is impossible for those, who read the Bible, not to agree in every thing necessary to salvation. This is the only unity of faith, which can ever be attained; no other is needed; to require any other, as a qualification for christian fellowship, gives evidence either of a deplorable ignorance of the objects of religion, or a wilful assumption of authority, which receives no countenance from the tenour of the Gospel, nor the reason of man.

A little experience soon proved to the first Reformers, that they could not give currency to what they would fain have acknowledged, as the *one sense* of Scripture. How, then, could these delusive notions of a unity of faith be realized? One resort only remained, and that was, to go back to the old contrivance of *creeds* and *restrictions*. They hastened to this resort, and thus thought to accomplish, by human systems, what they had despaired of doing by the native light and unaided force of the word of God.

The consequence was such as might be expected. This attempt at harmony and conciliation only in-

creased the flame, and aggravated the evils, which it was intended to allay. The creeds expressed the sentiments of their makers, and nothing more. If it chanced, that they agreed with the Bible, it was well ; but if it happened, that there was no such lucky agreement, they were, nevertheless, clothed with the same authority, and imposed with the same confidence and dictation. And even supposing they did agree, the persons on whom creeds were intended to operate would not be more likely to believe the truths of Scripture, when woven into a set of unscriptural phrases, than they would when expressed in the words of the Scriptures themselves. In their most favourable aspect, therefore, creeds are of no manner of use. If they contain precisely what the Bible contains, they are not wanted ; if they contain more, they are an imposition, and a clog to faith and holiness. If the word of divine truth, as revealed from heaven, will not bring about a unanimity, surely there is no little folly, no little presumption, in supposing it to be more easily done by any forms of human contrivance.

No sooner had a certain number of persons separated themselves from the main body, under pretence of having the true faith in a formulary of their own making, than pride and self-consequence began to spring up on the one part, and jealousy and disaffection on the other. These were followed by divisions, enmity, hatred, evil thoughts, and unrighteous deeds. They, who still adhered to the first principles of the Reformation, to the freedom of judgment

and the authority of the Scriptures, considered their liberty invaded, and were as little prepared to submit to this new domination, as to the old against which they had rebelled. A spirit of resistance was awakened, and this is always accompanied with passion and excitement. It leads to violence, resentments, harsh feelings, and to a thousand ill effects, which destroy peace, and the good influences of the Gospel.

When it was found, that some christians valued themselves for their creed, and held it up as a badge of distinction, and a token of superior sanctity, it is not wonderful, that others, who could not bend their consciences into that shape, should, nevertheless, resolve not to be out-done by their brethren, especially in so easy a mode of gaining consequence, and should construct a creed to their own liking. So it happened. Creeds rose upon creeds, and the inventors of every new one would be particularly careful to draw out the points in which they differed from others as prominent and full as possible, that they might prove how solid were their grounds of dissent. Hence every additional creed was certain to contain something not before discovered. It would have manifested a sorrowful lack of wisdom, indeed, to go through the trouble and formality of making a new creed, which should contain only what was already in others of good authority. Here, then, was a most prolific source of religious dogmas; they were multiplied from this source; and every new article added a new point of contention.

Thus, the predictions of the Catholics were in a good degree verified by the very measures, which were employed to prove their futility. Protestants were divided in every thing, and it was vain to ask where was the true faith. Each one found it in his own church, but to thousands of others this church was heretical. To do away the reproach, a project was at length formed of bringing together the most popular creeds under the imposing title of a *Harmony of Confessions*. This was done, but, alas, no harmony appeared. Not a church in Christendom would have adopted any two of these confessions entire, much less the whole in a body. In some things they agreed, in many they differed; and together they proved to what an extreme of contradictions even Protestants could run, when they abandoned the principles of the Reformation, preferred their own wisdom to the wisdom of God, and their own inventions to the simplicity of the Gospel precepts.

To the passion for established Confessions may be attributed the propensity, so common among christians, of calling harsh names, applying reproachful epithets, and charging their brethren with heresy and unbelief. It is observable, that they who are the most rigidly wedded to forms of faith, have usually been the first to commence the outcry of heresy, and the most relentless in pursuing the unfortunate delinquent. The reason is obvious. While they are guided by human forms, why should they not condemn all persons as infidels, who persist in acknowledging assent to the Bible only? Was any

man ever denounced as a heretic for not believing in the Bible? Not one. Martyrs have been tried by creeds, and condemned for denying creeds. They have suffered for the constancy of their faith in the Scriptures. Does not every church employ the term heretic to denote one, who rejects its assumed articles? Does not that, which makes a heretic in one church, make a saint in another? Judge every man by the Bible alone, and you will have no further occasion to torture his conscience and blacken his character with the hideous terrors of excommunications, anathemas, and cruel aspersions on the charge of heresy.

I speak not of the original meaning of the word, but of its popular use, or rather abuse. Every person, charged with heresy, professes a firm and sincere belief in the Gospel. Otherwise he would not be a heretic, but an infidel. His accusers call him a heretic, not because he does not believe the Bible, but because he cannot believe it as they do. He is a heretic in the eyes of Calvinists, because, perhaps, he does not believe one of the five points; of Arminians, because he believes them all; of Baptists,-because he sprinkles infants; of Congregationalists, because he does not sprinkle them; of Presbyterians, because he believes in bishops; of Churchmen, because he does not believe in them. And so we are all heretics to one another, and yet the faith and hopes of all centre in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Is it said, that in accusations of heresy, the accuser always understands the term to indicate a deficien-

cy of faith in the Scriptures? Let this be granted, and the case is not altered. The accused tells you that he *does* believe the Scriptures, and what better authority can be had, than his own declaration? May he not justly consider the enforcement of a charge, under such circumstances, as the wickedest persecution? Why is he to be branded with an odious epithet for valuing his faith as dearly as another, who may rashly accuse him of being a heretic, for maintaining his independence and a clear conscience? Abolish creeds, obey the Scriptures, respect conscience, and no room will be left for churches, or individuals, to denounce their brethren as heretics, or to kindle discord by recrimination and offence.*

But oppression and tyranny, contentions and broils, quarrels between churches, enmities between neighbours, coldness between friends, faction in states, tumults in society, tranquillity disturbed, peace destroyed, and good faith violated, have not constituted

* The following remarks of Bishop Hoadly are just and forcible. "This is laid down as certain, that though true religion be little regarded, but rather trampled on by the generality of the world, yet the pretences taken from thence are moving, and never fail to alarm the multitude, and to forward a design. Any doctrine manifestly framed to serve a purpose, can at any time be made the distinguishing mark of a true christian, or the true church; and all, that will not yield to the truth of it, shall presently be branded with some religious nickname or other. *Heretic, schismatic, latitudinarian, fanatic,* and the like, are all names taken from some differences, in the holding and professing the same religion. And they have been used so freely, and after such a manner, as that they have often effectually contributed to the destruction of christian charity, to the overthrow of peace and concord, to the ruin of many excellent designs, and to the promoting of many bad ones." Hoadly's Works, Fol. Vol. I. p. 36.

all the bad effects of prescribed forms of belief. They have been the refuge of depravity, the cloak of artifice, the screen of hypocrisy, a veil of darkness, which has concealed many a purpose of blackest die, many a heart of foulest treachery. They have too often produced, in the language of Jerom, *Concordia malorum major quam bonorum*, a greater harmony of wicked, than of good men. Who does not respect the garb of piety? Who will suffer the eye of suspicion to rest on the robes of formal sanctity? When a man talks much of his creed, and punctually observes the written forms of his church, does not all the world cry out, his faith is sound, and all must be right? Here is the deception. Piety is so rare a grace, that we are apt to connect its essence with forms; and Confessions of faith are the most convenient and imposing forms imaginable. They cost nothing; they may be had for the wearing; and they afford an impenetrable covert for every species of fraud and iniquity.

Again, the habit of creed making has given rise to a dangerous fallacy respecting the *extent* of a true christian faith. Many seem to think a system of belief valuable and safe only in proportion to its length. The gradual enlargement of the standard Confessions has encouraged this notion. The most ancient creed, fabulously denominated the Apostles', contains a dozen lines; the Nicene, twice as much; the Athanasian, twice as much more; the Augsburg Confession contains twenty-eight chapters; the English, thirty-nine articles; the Scotch, thirty-three

chapters. Thus have points of difference been multiplied. Every age has added something, till finally the more copious the system of faith, the more secure the believer thinks himself.

It is no uncommon thing to find persons, who tremble at the thought of believing too little, but never dream of the peril of believing too much. And yet, which is the most dangerous? What is it to have a correct faith? Is it not to believe the exact truth? Is the hazard less on one side, than on the other?

It seems a matter of confidence and satisfaction to some, that, since they believe all that others believe, and much more, their chance of salvation is proportionably enhanced. What is this *much more*? If it be truth, it is important; but if it be error, it is a pernicious addition. The doctrines of the christian religion are facts; they are to be studied as facts, and understood as such. They rest on evidence and conviction, and to carry them beyond these, manifests weakness and credulity, rather than a teachable disposition, or a sound mind. When you search for historical facts, are you gratified, that the historian tells you a great deal more than ever happened? When you read a book of science, do you think it an advantage, that the writer has interwoven conjectures of his own with his demonstrations, and the results of his experiments? Why, then, should it be thought safe to adopt a principle in religion, which is the last, that would be admitted in the inquiries of common life, and which affords no means of distinguishing truth from falsehood?

In short, as credulity is a more common failing than distrust, there is a much greater proneness to multiply, than diminish, the objects of faith. It is better, says Cicero, to think nothing, than to meditate evil. *Nil sentire est melius, quam præva sentire.* We may say the same of belief. It is better to have no faith at all, than to believe what is false. Additions to truth are errors, and from these have chiefly arisen divisions and discords; not from any want of faith in the essential truths of the Gospel, but from a belief, or a pretended belief, in many things not contained there. The only remedy is to go back to the Scriptures, and start with the conviction, that the true christian faith consists in believing just enough and no more.

But one of the worst effects of this system of prescribing faith, and dictating to conscience, has been to encourage pride and a malignant temper. Slight divisions have grown up into a most violent rancour, which has increased in bitterness, till it has ended in a consummation of all that is wicked in the human heart, *the spirit of intolerance*; that spirit whose breath is a pestilence, whose touch is death, and whose delights are scenes of darkness and iniquity; that spirit, which Christ censured in the haughty, persecuting Jews, and which incited these same Jews to demand his death, to mock at his sufferings, and revile him in his dying moments; that spirit, which led suffering martyrs to the stake and consigned them to the flames; which darkened, deluded, and tortured the world for ages, kindled the ferocious zeal of

bigotry, forged the chains, and lighted up the faggots of persecution. Shall we say, that this spirit still lives? Does it not live in the hearts of those, who would reproach and disturb others for their opinions, and who are more zealous to show their regard for the faith, than for the essential virtues of the christian religion? Does it not live where misrepresentation and abuse usurp the place of christian love and charity, and where hatred and malevolence blot out the kind affections? In some degree it dwells in the breast of every man, who would encroach on the religious liberty of another, and fix a stigma of reproach where he cannot fasten the chains of his creed.

How is it, that the emotions of pity, humanity, and tenderness, voluntarily rise up when we behold our fellow-men in trouble, or distress, or under any temporal calamity; but if they are suspected of being so unfortunate as to entertain a false opinion, or to swerve from what we are pleased to call the true faith, they are at once denounced and shunned as dangerous to society; the passions are inflamed; they are treated rudely; they are assaulted with the voice of menace and irritation; the milk of human kindness seems to be dried up from its source; the currents of benevolence and sympathy are frozen in their channels? Not a trace can be detected of that mild, and forbearing, and gentle, and affectionate spirit, which pervades the Gospel, and ought to reside in the breast of every christian.

Why should any persons desire to persecute others, or clamour against them, because they cannot in conscience subscribe to the same articles, nor bring their minds to receive the same opinions as themselves? Is any one injured by what others think? Certainly not. Why then be disturbed? Because, some have said, although we are not injured, God is dishonoured, and it is our duty to vindicate his honour, and support the cause of true religion.

Let such imitate God. Does he show resentment; does he inflict the punishment of his neglect and displeasure; does he pour out the vials of his wrath on those especially, who do not agree with them in opinion? Are they scorched by his lightnings, or do his thunders burst on their heads alone? On the contrary, are not all equally the objects of his bounty and blessings, his paternal care and protecting providence? Shall we have the vanity and presumption to think, that we are vindicating the honour of God, by pursuing a course of action directly opposed to all his dealings with men, by violating his commands, and doing injury, where he confers unmeasured favours? If we would promote his glory, let it be our highest concern to obey and imitate him. In regard to our differences with our brethren, in which we all believe ourselves right, let us humbly ask, in the language of Paul, “Who maketh us to differ? What have we, that we did not receive?” God is the author of all; him alone are we to serve; him alone are we to please.

Thus have we briefly developed the principal causes of the evils, which the protestant church at

large has suffered. The influence of the same causes may be followed into narrower circles, and be found no less destructive of religious truth, harmony, and practice. Churches there are, which profess to unite under one name, and which come together at stated times in the form of a Convocation, Convention, Association, or General Assembly. Each of these has a creed, to regulate the faith of the whole body, and every member proffers a solemn declaration, that he will adhere to all its articles. But where is the Convention, or the Assembly, in which there is any thing like a unanimity of belief?

Take the English Church for an example. Have not every shade and gradation of sentiments, many of which are as opposite to each other as light to darkness, been zealously and pertinaciously taught in that church, in defiance of the three Creeds and the thirty-nine Articles? Take the Presbyterian Church for another example. Is it not a notorious fact, that many in this enclosure are Hopkinsians and Arminians, and that a very small portion believe literally in all the dogmas of the Westminster Divines? No one will deny these facts. And is not the inference just, that imposing a formulary, which thus ensnares men's souls, is a source of incalculable injury to pure religion? It leads either to hypocrisy, to violations of a sacred agreement, or to down-right excommunication, either of which justly brings a scandal on the christian profession.

The Congregationalists, and perhaps other sects, have another practice. Not content with the con-

fessions, creeds, and platforms, bequeathed to them by their fathers, as pillars of support to the fabric of their faith, separate congregations have taken care doubly to fortify themselves by minor formularies, or covenants, to the fashion of which every member must be conformed. Into these choice symbols you will often find wrought all the mysteries of school divinity, ontology, pneumatology, and metaphysics, to which the most untutored mind in the parish must acknowledge his undoubting assent and consent, before he can be admitted to the privileges of a christian. Here you have the poison of this system extending to the minutest ramifications of society. You may behold its effects in the divisions of churches, law-suits about church property, quarrels among neighbours, altercations among friends, and irreconcileable alienations supplanting good fellowship and kind feelings.

Let it be observed, however, that the mischief of creed-making does not arise simply from bringing together a set of articles, to which any one is ready to subscribe. Every man's faith is in some sense a creed, and in itself considered there is no more crime in writing it out, than there is in thinking it over in his mind. It is not writing it, nor arranging it into articles, nor endeavouring by fair argument to convince others of its truth, that clothes it with danger, and converts it into an instrument of disorganization and oppression. It would certainly be much better to be guided by Scripture language, and be satisfied with the words of divine wisdom, yet there

can be no essential harm in telling the world what we believe in our own way, provided we are disposed to go no farther. But, unfortunately, no one is contented to stop here; nor have creeds ever been made for the purpose alone of expressing what their makers believed. They have invariably been designed to operate on the minds of others; they have been thrust forward as tests of a true faith; they have been imposed as conditions of christian fellowship. In this consists their mischief, in their usurpation, their encroachment on right, their assault on conscience, their exclusive, intolerant tendency.*

The argument of this letter conducts us to a single result, which is, that by far the largest portion of divisions, disorders, and wickedness prevalent in the christian church since the Reformation, may be distinctly referred to causes in all respects opposed to the principles of Unitarianism. With Unitarians the

* The following are the pertinent remarks of Dr. Chandler, in alluding to the persecuting habit of dictating articles of faith.

"As ecclesiastical history gives us so dreadful an account of the melancholy and tragical effects of this practice, one would think, that no nation, who knew the worth of liberty, no christian protestant church, that had any regard for the peace of the flock of Christ, should ever be found to authorize and continue it.

"What security, then, shall we have left us for truth and orthodoxy, when our subscriptions are gone? Why, the sacred Scriptures, those oracles of the great God, and freedom and liberty to understand and interpret them as we can. The consequence of this would be great integrity and peace of conscience, in the enjoyment of our religious principles; union and friendship amongst christians, notwithstanding all their differences in judgment. We shall lose only the incumbrances of religion, our bones of contention, the shackles of our consciences, and the snares to honesty and virtue; whilst all that is substantially good and valuable, all that is truly divine and heavenly, would remain to enrich and bless us." Introduction to a Translation of Limborch's History of the Inquisition, p. 110.

Bible is paramount to all other authority ; they account it a sacred duty to maintain a perfect liberty of thought, inquiry, and judgment. They do not admit, that any one, with justice to himself, and integrity to the christian cause, can transfer this prerogative to another. Religion connects every man with his Maker by personal responsibility and obligations of duty, and not through the medium of other men's thoughts and advice. The welfare of his soul depends on what he shall alone think, resolve, and do. All the opinions of all the world would not make him a christian, nor bring him one step nearer to his God, unless he were faithful to his own understanding and conscience.

The slightest attempt to bind him to a particular notion, or to make him turn traitor to the unbiassed reflections of his own mind, is an insult to his nature, and a presumptuous attack on his moral freedom. To attempts of this sort, as we have seen, are to be ascribed almost all the evils, which, in one shape or another, have spread devastation and misery over the christian world, and counteracted the benign influence of a holy religion. And they have been started and prosecuted in violation of the spirit of Unitarianism.

This is no less true in principle, than fact. Unitarians have not participated in the causes, which have produced these disasters. One reason is, to be sure, that the smallness of their numbers has prevented their having power to do much good or harm. But this does not weaken the argument. It only

lays the burden more heavily on the orthodox themselves, and compels them to admit, that the persecutions, and violence, and enormous wickedness, which every serious heart deplores, have actually grown out of their sentiments. Unitarians have had no agency in the affair. The spirit of orthodoxy has reigned triumphant; it has done all, that has been done.

Now, whatever charges may be advanced against the particular opinions of Unitarians, it must at all events be granted, that experience and the history of the church exhibit effects of orthodoxy quite as terrible as any, which the most vivid imagination has pictured to itself in the train of these opinions. While engaged in examining particular sentiments in regard to their moral tendency, it is proper to keep this fact in mind, and also to remember, that the principles of orthodoxy have been thoroughly tried in all their varieties, and under every circumstance of place, time, government, laws, forms of discipline, and ecclesiastical order. They have been tried and found wanting. Not that I would use this as a proof of the truth, or perfection, of Unitarian sentiments; these must stand on their own merits; but I do contend, that this fact, so broad and well established, is a strong evidence against the moral influence of orthodoxy, as opposed to Unitarianism. It is a practical demonstration in respect to the combined action of a system, and ought to have much weight in confirming the coincident results of theory and argument,

as applied to the individual parts of which that system is composed.

I shall now proceed to the specific charges, which you and others have made against the character and opinions of Unitarians. I hope to make it appear from fact, and reason, and Scripture, that these charges have been thrown out with more haste than discretion, more zeal than knowledge, more vehemence than judgment. The spirit and latitude of your charges naturally draw me into somewhat of an extended view of the subject. You attack character and principles. These shall be defended both on their own grounds, and by comparing them with the character and principles of the orthodox. This is the only mode in which the subject can be fully and fairly examined.

The task, I am aware, has its difficulties. Nothing is more easy, than for the mind to run into extremes in pursuing a favourite train of thought or investigation. This is particularly true in following what we deem false opinions to their results. Imaginary consequences thicken around us as we advance; we soon persuade ourselves that they are real; and then we are ready to charge them to the account of our opponents. "How often," says Watts, when alluding to this mode of inquiry, in his admirable *Essay on Uncharitableness*, "how often do we put their opinions upon the rack; we torture every joint and article of them, till we have forced them to confess some formidable errors, which their authors never knew or dreamed of. Thus the original

notions appear with a frightful aspect, and the sectarians of them grow to be the object of our abhorrence, and have forfeited their right to every grain of our charity." This is no doubt a natural tendency of our zeal for cherished opinions, and an eagerness to spy out something alarming in those of an opposite kind. It can hardly be hoped, perhaps, that this zeal will be entirely extinguished in prosecuting such an investigation, as the one on which we are now entered. Let a knowledge of its existence and bearing teach us a lesson of caution, moderation, candour, and charity, if it do no more.

LETTER III.

On Charges against the Character of Unitarians.

SIR,

I HAVE read your Ordination Sermon, preached some time since at Baltimore, and propose offering for your consideration a few remarks on that part particularly, which relates to Unitarians. Many persons have been at a loss to conjecture, what evil star could induce you to select that occasion for making so violent and unprovoked an attack on a class of christians, who have shown no disposition to molest you, nor the society, which you had the honour to address. And I confess myself among the number

of those, who have not been able to reconcile your conduct with the maxims of christian faith and practice, by which I could not doubt you aimed to be guided.

It was easy to conceive, that you might have no very high respect for the *opinions* of Unitarians, because your own are so widely different. Nor was it difficult to imagine, that you might regard these opinions as errors, and might look with concern on the spiritual condition of those, who were so unfortunate as to embrace them. You might think it necessary, on suitable occasions, to point out such errors, to confute them by fair and temperate argument, and to make known their dangerous tendency. It was easy to suppose, that your love of truth, your sincerity, and your zeal in the cause of pure religion, might prompt you to so benevolent and pious a work. All this, done with moderation, and a proper spirit, would not only be pardonable, but praise-worthy. It is every preacher's duty to support what he thinks to be truth, and by all just and honourable means to dig away what he conceives to be the sandy foundations of error.

But you have taken a course widely different from this. Instead of coming forward to detect and confute the dangerous opinions of Unitarians, instead of attempting to convince them by argument, and to win them from their errors by affectionate persuasion and salutary warnings, you have at the outset fixed on them the mark of heresy, denied to them the christian name, and accused them of immorality and

irreligion in practice. You seem equally unwilling to allow them the name of christians, the praise of goodness, and the credit of honest intentions.

But before I proceed further, I will quote your own words. After relating to your readers the story of Paul of Samosata and Queen Zenobia, and assuring them "that great cities have commonly been, in all ages, the hot beds of error," you go on as follows.

" In great cities, likewise, or, at least, in states of society similar to what is commonly found in such places, has generally commenced that fatal decline from orthodoxy, which began, perhaps, with calling in question some of what are styled the more rigid peculiarities of received creeds, and ended in embracing the dreadful, soul-destroying errors of *Arius or Socinus*. We might easily illustrate and confirm this position, by examples, drawn from our own country, had we time to trace the history of several sects among us, and especially of American Unitarianism. But I forbear to pursue the illustration farther: and shall only take the liberty to ask, as I pass along—How it is to be accounted for, that the preaching of those who deny the Divinity and Atonement of the Saviour, and who reject the doctrines of Human Depravity, of Regeneration, and of Justification by the righteousness of Christ—How, I ask, is it to be accounted for, that such preachers, all over the world, are most acceptable to the gay, the fashionable, the worldly-minded, and even the licentious? That so many embrace and eulogize their system, without being, in the smallest perceptible degree, sanctified by it? That thousands are in love with it, and praise it; but that we look in vain for the monuments of its reforming and purifying power? I will not pretend to answer these questions; but leave them to the consciences of those who believe, that the genuine doctrines of the Gospel always have had, and always will have, a tendency to promote holiness of heart and of life; and that we must all speedily appear before the judgment seat of Christ."

To these singular remarks, you add the following in the form of a note.

"The aboyme language, concerning the destructive nature of the *Arian* and *Socinian* heresies, has not been adopted lightly ; but is the result of serious deliberation, and deep conviction. And in conformity with this view of the subject, the Author cannot forbear to notice and record a declaration made to himself, by the late *Dr. Priestley*, two or three years before the decease of that distinguished Unitarian. The conversation was a free and amicable one, on some of the fundamental doctrines of religion. In reply to a direct avowal on the part of the Author, that he was a *Trinitarian* and a *Calvinist*, *Dr. Priestley* said—‘ I do not wonder that you Calvinists entertain and express a strongly unfavourable opinion of us Unitarians. The truth is, there neither can, nor ought to be, any compromise between us. If *you* are right, WE ARE NOT CHRISTIANS AT ALL ; and if *we* are right, YOU ARE GROSS IDOLATERS.’ These were, as nearly as can be recollectcd, the words, and, most accurately, the substance of his remark. And nothing, certainly, can be more just. Between those who believe in the Divinity and Atonement of the Son of God, and those who entirely reject both, ‘ *there is a great gulph fixed,*’ which precludes all ecclesiastical intercourse. The former may greatly respect and love the latter, on account of other qualities and attainments ; but certainly cannot regard them as CHRISTIANS, in any correct sense of the word ; or any more in the way of salvation, than *Mohammedans or Jews.*”

Such is the language, which you incorporated into an ordination sermon. The charges contained in these quotations, you will allow to be of no ordinary kind. It is no trifling thing for any class of christians to be excluded in a body from the pale of christianity, and openly accused of licenciousness and immorality. In the remarks about to be made, it will be taken for granted, that your char-

ges were aimed exclusively at those persons wherever they may be found, who call themselves Unitarians. That they do, or do not hold to the opinions, which you attribute to them, is a thing of no consequence as it respects my present purpose. Your attack is directed at the moral character of Unitarian believers, not as the speculative and probable result of the nature, or tendency of their opinions, but as it actually exists. It is the correctness of your assertions on this point, which is now to be examined. By what authority has it been declared, that among Unitarians, you "look in vain for the monuments of the reforming and purifying power" of their religious sentiments?

It is, indeed, to be regretted, that you did not find "time to trace the history of American Unitarianism," before you ventured such a declaration. By such a process, perhaps, the public might have become acquainted with facts, from which the strength of this position would be more manifest. Or was it supposed, that in passing sentence of condemnation on a large portion of the christians of this country, and in publishing against them the charge of immorality, there was no occasion to exhibit testimony? Could it be imagined, that the persons against whom such an attack was made, would quietly submit to have their characters impeached, without exposing unguarded asseverations, and demanding evidence? Although they were denied the privilege and name of *christians*, it could not be forgotten, that they are *men*, and as such can feel an injury, and per-

ceive a violation of justice and the common laws of humanity, as quickly as other men of whom it might be thought a christian duty to speak in better terms.

Let me first ask, for what purpose was this anecdote about Dr. Priestley introduced? What does it prove? I am willing to believe, that Dr. Priestley said precisely what is here put into his mouth, and yet I cannot see the least connexion between these premises and your conclusion. Was it fair or honourable to quote language, which had been used in private and friendly conversation, and this from memory, after a lapse of twenty years; was it fair to quote such language as a proof, that a large body of professed Christians have no title to this name, and are “no more in the way of salvation, than Mohammedans or Jews?” But waving this consideration, pray in what respect are the words of Dr. Priestley to your purpose, except on the supposition, that your opinions are certainly right, and his certainly wrong? If Trinitarianism be, indeed, the true doctrine, then we have the authority of Dr. Priestley, to warrant us in saying, that Unitarians “are not christians at all.” And it is only on this condition, that his authority in any degree sanctions your conclusions. Nay, let it be admitted, that Dr. Priestley actually believed Unitarians to be no christians, or Trinitarians to be idolaters, or any thing else, would this verily make it so? And above all, are the opinions of an individual to be taken as the groundwork of a sentence of condemnation on a numerous class of christians, who may.

or may not, agree in adopting the views of that individual.

Since, then, this anecdote proves nothing, it is difficult to tell why it should be thought so important as to be recorded in a book. By making Dr. Priestley speak this language, and giving it such a construction, as you would have it bear, he is exhibited in a character directly opposite to that, in which he appeared during his whole life. In him no traits were more remarkable, than his mild and amiable temper, his benevolent and christian spirit, and his desire to open the door of christian fellowship to all the believers in Jesus, and followers of his word. And yet, his authority is here used to justify one of the severest censures, which one christian could pronounce on another, and to sanction against persons, whose opinions resemble his, a sentence of total exclusion, not only from all ecclesiastical intercourse, but from the common privileges of christians.

In regard to the charge of *licentiousness* and *immorality*, which you have made against Unitarians, you must not think me importunate in making a few direct and particular inquiries. Let me ask, whether you have the testimony of your own experience? Have you lived in the society of Unitarians, and do you judge from personal observation? Have you had any direct means whatever of knowing the practical effects of their principles? These questions, it is presumed, will be answered in the negative. And was it not premature, to say the least, thus to impeach the morals of a class of christians, without hav-

ing from experience a most intimate knowledge of facts? Hearsay, and rumour, and conjecture were not enough in so grave a matter.

Although you had never witnessed the state of morals or religion in a society composed wholly of Unitarians, you were undoubtedly acquainted with individuals of this belief, and some, perhaps, whom you have reason to call your friends. And have you, indeed, found among these persons such marks of depravity and irreligion, that you feel authorized from their example to fix a stigma, and pass a sentence of reprobation on a whole sect? If it had been your misfortune to meet only with such characters among Unitarians, and you judged from what you saw, it would have been but doing justice to the great body of those, who profess their belief, to let the public know the source, as well as the extent of your information. As your charges stand at present, your readers are called on to believe, that they are applicable "all over the world." And although you might think your conclusions deduced by good logic, others might not, and in a case of so much importance, it would have seemed proper at least to make your antecedent propositions as clear as your deductions.

Let me inquire further, and call your attention particularly to that portion of the country, where Unitarian principles have been long prevalent, and where they are embraced by a large portion of the community. Are you prepared to charge the people of Boston, and its vicinity, with a higher degree of im-

morality, and depravity of manners, than is found in other cities? Are you prepared to say, that the churches in that place, more than in any other, are filled with the "gay, the fashionable, the worldly minded, and the licentious?" In Boston, if anywhere, may be found a proof of your assertions, because in that place the Unitarians probably make the most numerous class of society. But will you come before the public with any attempt to exhibit such proof? No. You will not assail the moral character of a great number of the leading and most respectable members of society. You will never investigate the state of manners, the charitable and religious institutions, the morals and practical piety of Unitarians, as a body, in any place, and then publish the result of your investigation, as a proof, that they are more "worldly minded" or "licentious," than christians of other denominations. This is an attempt in which you never will engage.

It is true, you have hinted at discoveries, which might be made, had you "time to trace the history of American Unitarianism." Was not this an unfair insinuation? Your readers are left to imagine much evil concealed, which nothing but want of time prevents you from bringing to light. It is incumbent on you to disabuse them by tracing this history. Let it be done impartially, and then compared with the history of the Presbyterian church, or of any other church, and no Unitarian will shrink from the parallel. He will want no better illustration of the comparative moral influence of his principles, and no clearer refutation of your charges.

In regard to Unitarians generally, I do not doubt, that there are some among them, whose lives and conduct are not so much influenced by religious principles, as every good man and pious christian could wish. But I would gladly be informed, if there are no such among the Presbyterians, and other denominations? Are all sects immaculate, but Unitarians? Unless this be the case, on what principles of justice are these singled out, as worthy of special denunciation? Unitarians are not in the habit of proclaiming their virtues, and their religious acts from the house-top. *Pii orant taciti.* Piety adores in silence. They consider religion a thing, in which a man is intimately concerned with his Maker. Where it does not exist in the heart, speak to the conscience in the still small voice of heavenly truth, and exercise a controlling influence over the affections and the will, they look on pretensions, show, and loud professions as proving little else, than hypocrisy and delusion. Perhaps they do not make so much parade and noise about religion, as some others; but even allowing this, it still remains to be proved, that they have less of the humble spirit of fervent piety, less of earnestness in their devotions, and of ardour in their love and pursuit of truth, less, indeed, of any of those qualities, which our Saviour has declared to be requisite in his sincere and faithful followers. Now these are things, which have not been proved, and which it is not likely you will undertake to prove.

The truth is, that, in modern times, at least, Unitarianism has every where been an unpopular faith. It is embraced at the expense of many sacrifices of

personal interest and influence, of the affection of friends, and the esteem of the world. Unitarians of the present day, both in this country and in England, are converts from the different sects of orthodoxy. They have changed their sentiments from serious conviction, founded on inquiry and a desire of truth. Every inducement, which the world could hold out, every motive, which could spring from a love of self, or a prospect of future gain, or a hope of temporal aggrandizement, has conspired to try their integrity, and to keep them in the ranks of orthodoxy. They have resisted all. The silent voice of conscience has been more powerful with them, than the clamours of the world. Upheld by the majesty of truth, and the rectitude of good intention, they have shut their ears to the cry of heresy, infidelity, and irreligion; they have submitted to the assaults of bigotry and persecution; they have willingly suffered the reproaches, and given up the good opinion of men, for the commands of Christ, and the consolations of a scriptural faith.

In conduct like this do you discover no indications of a moral sense, and a righteous purpose? What laws of human nature bring you to the conclusion, that a large class of persons have voluntarily resigned many of their worldly advantages, their privileges and attachments, and submitted to become the by-word of their brethren, whom they have loved and respected, and exposed themselves to all the odious charges, which willing credulity and ignorant zeal could devise, and yet have no claims to the merit of

pure motives and virtuous action? Almost every Unitarian, in the very circumstance of avowing his sentiments, has exhibited as strong a testimony as he could exhibit, of his sincerity, his high value of religious truth, and his deep sense of religious obligation. If he had any objects of selfishness to advance, any schemes of power or of profit to execute, or any other ends to attain, which are desirable in the eyes of the "worldly-minded," and near the heart of the "licentious," would his first step be to forfeit the good will, and put himself beyond the patronage of those, who are best able to help him forward?

Your charges have an application more extensive, than may at first appear. They reach to some of the greatest, wisest, and best men, who have adorned the world. Your sweeping denunciation embraces all Unitarians of every age and country. If your charges are well-founded, Newton, Locke, and Chillingworth, were "no christians in any correct sense of the word, nor any more in the way of salvation, than Mohammedans or Jews?" And even Lardner, whom all parties honour as the best of men, and unanimously quote, as the most learned and able advocate of the christian cause, must come under the same censure.

Those ornaments of the Episcopal church, Dr. Samuel Clarke, Hoadly, Law, and Blackburne, must be ranked with those, among whom "we look in vain for the monuments of the reforming and purifying power" of their faith. The charge of immorality, of preaching to please and win the "licentious,"

and of “not being in the smallest degree sanctified,” by their religion, must rest against such men as Emlyn, Whiston, Priestley, Lindsey, Price, Jebb, Wakefield, Chandler, Taylor, Benson, Cappe, Foster, Kippis, and a host of others among the English Unitarians, against whose moral character the tongue of slander has never ventured to raise a whisper.*

What excuse can be offered for the injustice done to the names of these men, by implicating their characters, and asserting the immoral *effects* of those principles, which they believed to be the foundation

* This observation may be verified by turning to any notices of the character of these men, whether from their friends or enemies. Two or three examples shall be selected.

The following testimony to the excellent character of Dr. Priestley, is from the pen of the celebrated Dr. Samuel Parr, who knew him well. It is contained in his letter from Irenopolis to the inhabitants of Eleuthropolis. “I confess with sorrow, that in too many instances, such modes of defence have been used against this formidable Heresiarch, as would hardly be justifiable in the support of revelation itself, against the arrogance of a Bolingbroke, the buffoonery of a Mandeville, and the levity of a Voltaire. But the cause of orthodoxy requires not such aids. The church of England approves them not. The spirit of Christianity warrants them not. Let Dr. Priestley be confuted where he is mistaken. Let him be exposed where he is superficial. Let him be rebuked where he is censorious. Let him be repressed where he is dogmatical. But let not his attainments be depreciated, because they are numerous almost without a parallel. Let not his talents be ridiculed, because they are superlatively great. Let not his morals be vilified, because they are correct without austerity, and exemplary without ostentation; because they present even to common observers the innocence of a hermit, and the simplicity of a patriarch; and because a philosophic eye will at once discover in them the deep fixed root of virtuous principle, and the solid trunk of virtuous habit.”—See Appendix to Magee on the Atonement, p. 477.

Even Dr. Horsley was forced to confess his respect for the talents and worth of his great antagonist. After expressing the little regard he had for Dr. Priestley’s “argument on a particular subject,” he goes on to add; “This hinders not, but that I may entertain the respect, which I profess for your learning in other subjects; for your abilities in all subjects in which you are learned; and a cordial esteem and affection for the virtues of your character,

of true religion, which kindled in them the light of piety and goodness, and to the illustration and diffusion of which, many of them devoted their lives at the cost of the greatest sacrifices? The persons, whose names have just been mentioned, and a multitude of others, whose names have not been mentioned, were remarkable for nothing more than their purity of manners and morals. It is not pretended, that there are no exceptions; but I am confident you cannot select an equal number of names of eminence from any sect, whose biographies and whose works

which I believe to be great and amiable." *Horsley's Letters to Priestley*, p. 276. Let. XVII.

The following remarks on the character of Lindsey are from a Trinitarian, the Rev. Job Orton, who has been called the "last of the Puritans." They are contained in his Letters to Dissenting Ministers.

"I am exceedingly glad," says he, "to hear, that Mr. Lindsey's chapel was so well filled, especially in the summer season, when the London congregations are generally thin. I have had two or three letters from that worthy and excellent man, whom I much esteem, and hold in the same veneration as I should have done one of the ejected and silenced Ministers a century ago. I have nothing to do with his particular sentiments; but his good sense, learning, piety, integrity, and desire to do good, demand the esteem and affection of every consistent Christian, especially every consistent Dissenter.

"Were I to publish an account of ejected and silenced Ministers, I should be strongly tempted to insert Mr. Lindsey in the list, which he mentions with so much veneration. He certainly deserves as much respect and honour as any one of them; for the part he has acted. Perhaps few of them exceeded him in learning or Piety. I venerate him as I would any of your confessors. As to his particular sentiments, they are nothing to me, any more than Baxter's, or Tonbes's, or John Goodwin's. An honest, pious man, who makes such a sacrifice to truth and conscience, as he has done, is a glorious character, and deserves the respect, esteem, and veneration of every true christian, whatever his particular sentiments may be."—See *Monthly Repository*, Vol. I. p. 304.

Among other English Unitarians, not mentioned above, whose talents and learning have never been disputed, and whose moral character will bear any scrutiny, which the eagle-eyed malice of their enemies can make, may be numbered the following; namely, Bishop Clayton, Abernethy, Leland, Lowman,

bear such uniform and unequivocal testimony to their reverence for divine truth, their amiable and excellent virtues, their christian meekness, charity, benevolence, fortitude, and a faithful discharge of their social and religious duties in every walk of life.

Nothing can be more diametrically opposite to the entire spirit of your charges, than the facts, which may be collected, by recurring to the lives and professions of distinguished Unitarians. These facts ought to be known and respected, before the liberty is taken to cast reproach on their moral character, and their religious faith. Is it to be believed, that Watts and Whitby became bad men, when they abandoned their trinitarian sentiments? Is there any evidence, that they were not as virtuous, as pious, and as sincere practical christians, as they had always previously been? Bishop Horsley, that paragon of meekness, candour, and charity, declared "the moral good of Unitarians to be sin." If this indeed be so, if it be really a duty to reprobate their virtues as vices, and to condemn in them what is worthy of the highest praise in others, then it must be confessed, that the charges against them of irreligion, licentiousness, and immorality, as proceeding from their

William Penn, Palmer, Tyrrwhit, Disney, Kenrick, Simpson, Toulmin, Reynolds, Estlin, Dr. Enfield, Bretland, Turner. To these may be added from among the earlier English Unitarians, Elwall, Biddle, Firmin, and Hopton Haynes, the friend and associate of Newton. The rare virtues of Biddle and Firmin have been celebrated by all parties. Bishop Burnet bears the highest testimony to the excellence of the latter. *History of his own Times*, Vol. III. p. 292. And even John Pye Smith, to whom the virtues of other Unitarians seem not to be virtues, calls Firmin a "mirror of charity."—*Letters to Belsham*, p. 88.

religious opinions, may admit of a plausible defence, but on no other grounds.

But, after all, what good is likely to be done by such charges? Is it not better to do something for harmony, christian love, and mutual kindness, than to apply the torch and kindle the flame of discord? Would not the cause of piety be more advanced by offering arguments to convince Unitarians of their errors, or persuasions to turn them from their sins, or counsel and advice to diminish, rather than strengthen the prejudices of their enemies, to allay, rather than inflame the passions? Would it not indicate more of the christian spirit to make an effort to rescue and save the beings, who are represented to be diving into the depths of depravity by system, and seeking their ruin upon principle, than it would to employ such force as could be commanded to increase their velocity, and hasten their destruction?

Your sentence of condemnation concerns Unitarians not merely as christians, but as men, as members of society. It regards them as immoral from the influence of their religious principles; and if this be true, they ought to be shunned by all good persons, as dangerous to the peace and order of the community. It would raise against them the inquisition of public opinion, and not only subject them to the prejudices of party zeal, and the caprices of ignorant credulity, but it would banish from them the privileges of society, the affections of friends, the charity and respect of the virtuous and the well-informed. Such a sentence requires explanation. It is due to truth, jus-

tice, and good faith ; and especially it is due to the persons who have been injured by this censure, whether intentionally or not, it is due to them, that some testimony should be advanced in its support, and some reasons assigned for so violent an attack on their morals, and their religious character. This is what they have a right to expect and demand.

LETTER IV.

Charges against the Opinions of Unitarians.

SIR,

I HAVE perused your Reply to a letter lately addressed to you, respecting certain charges against the moral character of Unitarians, contained in your Ordination Sermon. This Reply is of a nature, which requires a continuation of my remarks. I agree entirely with you, that the cause of truth and righteousness will not suffer, but rather be promoted, by fair investigation and temperate discussion. Without these, few truths, which are of any value, can be rationally and permanently established. It is only the flimsy texture of error, that will crumble and decay at the touch. It is only the counterfeit coin, that will be tarnished by the purifying test. And so with opinions; what is false may be detected and exposed by inquiry and argument; truth will stand

more firm, assume a statelier majesty, and shine with a brighter lustre.

For these reasons I do not regret, that you have imposed on me the necessity of speaking more at large on the subject of your charges against Unitarians. I should consider myself guilty of a culpable indifference and neglect, not to defend, when occasion requires, such opinions, and especially religious opinions, as I have adopted from a conviction of their truth. And if, in addition to this, I should not be prompt to repel unprovoked and unwarrantable attacks on my moral character, I should feel, that I had as little respect for myself, as love of virtue, and regard for religion.

You complain with some warmth of the kind of language used in my letter ; you think it harsh and disrespectful. Of this I am not aware. Applied to your general character, it possibly might be so ; but it was not thus applied ; it was used with exclusive reference to your Sermon. The writer was not obliged to know any thing more of your character, while commenting on that discourse, than he found there displayed ; and if he did know more, it was not his duty to let this knowledge betray him into language, which would not express his sentiments, to the exclusion of that, which he was conscious the nature of the subject imperiously demanded.

Besides, you seem to forget the provocation. Or have you seriously persuaded yourself, that there is nothing offensive in charging men, who feel that they are as sincere, as conscientious, as virtuous, and as

pious as yourself, with having embraced “dreadful and soul destroying errors,” and “destructive heresies;” and in affirming, that they “cannot be regarded as *christians* in any correct sense of the word, or as any more in the way of salvation, than Mohammedans or Jews;” that their “preachers *all over the world* are most acceptable to the gay, the fashionable, the worldly minded, and even the licentious;” that “they are not in the smallest perceptible degree sanctified by their system;” and that among them, you “look in vain for the monuments of its reforming and purifying power?” Do you suppose these expressions peculiarly calculated to soften the temper of those against whom they are directed, to draw them over to conciliation and mildness, or to teach them to search for soft and soothing phrases? Would any one be thought serious, who should take such a course under circumstances like these?

An attack, which involved the opinions, motives, conduct, and character of the persons on whom it was made; which aimed a destroying blow at every thing most valuable in life, and most consoling in prospect; such an attack, you could hardly suppose would be gently repelled. His sensibility is not to be envied, who could feel no shock from it. Every man is bound to defend his reputation; on this depends the dignity of his character, and his usefulness in life; when this is gone, nothing worth having remains. Had your attack extended to Unitarians only as members of civil society, they would have no ordinary grounds of complaint. As it is, the case

is more aggravating ; you come down particularly on their religious character ; you accuse them of immorality in consequence of spiritual blindness and religious errors ; the principles of their faith you represent to be peculiarly grateful to the loose and irreligious ; they have no reforming power ; their efficacy is not seen in the lives of those, who embrace them.

We should truly not deserve the privileges of christians, if we could recognize ourselves in the picture, which you have drawn. If our apathy were so great, as not to be excited by this exhibition, we might well suspect the truth, power, and nature of our religion. But even you allow us to be *sincere*. Would you allow it any longer, if we could acquiesce in the justice of your charges ? Can we be sincere in adopting principles of moral action, and of piety, and in offering a service to our Maker, which we know to be offensive in his sight ? Can we be sincere, in abetting a religion, which we are sure is working our ruin ? This is not possible. If we are sincere in any thing, it must be in what we believe to be the principles of a pure and holy religion, the truth as it is in Jesus, and in holding a faith, which we conceive will be the surest means of fixing the stamp of virtue and holiness on our characters, and of preparing us for realizing the hopes of a glorious immortality. To suppose a believer in Jesus *sincere* in pursuing the course, which you have ascribed to Unitarians, is absurd ; and if we are sincere in what we believe to be the true faith, and the great duties and obligations of the christian religion, we must think.—every princi-

ple of our nature compels us to think,—that the mode in which you have attacked us is singularly unjust and indefensible.

In your Reply, you have deserted the ground first taken, and which was the topic of discussion in my last letter. The subject in its original shape, as we have fully seen, related to the *moral character* of Unitarians; and your remarks *on that point only*, were all, which you were desired to explain and substantiate. This was more than once expressly stated. You were called on to give “some reasons for your violent attack on the morals and religious character” of Unitarians. This request has not been met, nor the subject scarcely touched.

But you have entered on a broader and very different field, by turning from *character* to the *nature and tendency of opinions*. This was setting aside the main purpose of inquiry. It was desired that you would point to some example; describe the state of morals among Unitarians where they are united in separate bodies; examine their institutions; refer to some authentic historical record; to the general sentiment of mankind; or, indeed, bring forward any sort of testimony, which should justify you in making charges of so serious an aspect against a whole denomination of christians. This has not been done, nor attempted.

As to the *tendency of opinions*, it is quite another thing; it is to be settled by examination of principles and by argument, and may be decided either way without impeaching any one's character. But *actual*

effects must be substantiated by positive proof. To charge immorality, is to assert a fact ; evidence is demanded ; immorality consists not in an opinion, but in visible acts, which may be cited. This you have not done ; you have referred to no class of Unitarians more wicked as a class, than their brethren of other denominations. You have singled them out, as prominent on the list of evil doers. Make it appear, by adducing facts, and they will be satisfied. Until you do, they must continue to think, that you have accused them wrongfully, and injured them without a cause.

A portion of your Reply is occupied in endeavouring to show the suitableness of the occasion, which you embraced for delivering the sentiments contained in your Sermon. To this I have little to say. It is natural however, to ask what good effect was likely to be produced by such unqualified and unauthenticated censures ? The religion of the Saviour is a religion of peace, brotherly love, good will, kindness, affection. These virtues he has commanded all men to practise, and made it the great characteristic of his true followers, that they love one another. Could the charges in your Sermon against Unitarians produce this effect ? Would your hearers or readers be more ready to love those of whom so revolting a picture was drawn, and who were denounced with so much earnestness ? And would the persons themselves, who were portrayed in such colours, have their tempers improved, their good feelings called forth, and the holy charities of their nature

multiplied and strengthened, by listening to the language in which they were described? When all the rules of moral perception, and all the laws of virtue, and all the principles of human nature, are inverted, you may expect such a result, and not before. Such descriptions might move the uninformed and the prejudiced, to shun, reproach, and hate Unitarians, but they could never excite an emotion of christian love.

There is another thing, also, which must have some weight on every fair mind. The Unitarians of the city where your Sermon was preached, had recently associated themselves into a regularly organized body for the purpose of worshipping God in such a way, as their consciences should dictate, their understanding direct, and as they should believe the Scriptures to teach. In doing this, they conformed to the laws of their country, as well as to the laws of religion. They asked no favours, they claimed no privileges, which others did not enjoy. They set up no pretensions, which they did not cheerfully allow to others; they asked no more, than to be left in quiet possession of the Bible, to be unmolested in searching for the truths, which it contains, in conforming to the instructions of the Saviour, and in seeking the salvation of their souls, by obeying his laws, and striving to render an acceptable service to their Maker. Notwithstanding this, it is well known, that public sentiment has been unreasonably excited against them. Their enemies have been busy to misrepresent, the credulous have been ready to believe, the timid to shudder with alarms, the ignorant to denounce, and

all have been inclined to look on Unitarians with an eye of distrust and aversion. Under such circumstances, and conscious of the purity of their motives, and of their responsibility to God, they could hardly deem it a mark of christian kindness in any one to hold them up as worthy of public censure, dangerous to society, unsound in faith, and immoral in their conduct.

But you say, "allow me to ask, are Unitarians in the habit of being very scrupulous about bringing forward their peculiar opinions on public and special occasions, and even in preaching ordination sermons?" This question, it is presumed, every Unitarian will joyfully answer in the negative. The time will never come, it is hoped, when Unitarians will be "scrupulous about bringing forward their peculiar opinions" in any place. And what is this to the purpose? No one has complained, that you should enforce your *peculiar opinions* in such a place and manner as you choose. That charges were made against the *character* of others was the complaint, and not that you attacked their opinions or published your own. On what occasion has a Unitarian preacher done this? Never. Look over their printed discourses, consult as many persons, as you will, who have heard such as have not been printed, and then show me a single example in which the Presbyterians, Episcopilians, Catholics, or any other sect, have been selected and denounced, as peculiarly *immoral* from the nature of their religious faith, or from any other cause; show me but one example, and I will give up the argu-

ment. You can find none. But suppose you could ; suppose it were true, that Presbyterians, or any other body of christians, have been denounced and accused of immorality by Unitarian preachers, it would not readily appear, how such an outrage could justify any one in following their steps.

It is time, however to dismiss this part of the subject, and to come more directly to the points, which remain for discussion. In removing your charges from the moral character of Unitarians, and fixing them on the tendency of their principles and opinions, you have rendered them much more indefinite, and connected with them many additional topics. Several of the particulars, incorporated with your remarks on the evil tendency of Unitarian sentiments, it will be necessary to examine with considerable attention ; such, for instance, as your statements concerning the christian name, the nature and objects of christian charity, and the opinions and characters of some of the most distinguished English Unitarians. The extraordinary errors, into which I think you have fallen in treating of these topics, seem to serve as a kind of support in your mind of other errors more important, and not less extraordinary, respecting the principles and tendency of Unitarian doctrines. To correct the former, will aid in some degree to remove the latter.

You charge Unitarians with denying all the *essential doctrines* of the christian religion, and with embracing in their room sentiments, whose influence drives them naturally into irreligion and immorality.

Some of these sentiments, which are deemed most offensive and objectionable, you particularize. Such will be distinctly examined. In considering this charge in its proper latitude and various bearings, and in testing the accuracy of your views and statements, I shall pursue the following method.

I. Inquire into the import of the christian name; pointing out the evils of confining it to particular sects, and examining on what authority any person assumes the right of denying it to those, who believe in the Gospel, and in the divine mission of Christ. Inquire, also, into the nature of charity as explained in the Scriptures, and practised by the first christians, showing the weak and unscriptural pretence on which some of the orthodox would limit its operation to the few of a favourite party.

II. Consider the doctrine of the trinity, its origin, meaning, and authority, and especially its moral tendency. Also, the doctrine of atonement, as understood by different christians, and the comparative influence of Unitarian and orthodox views in relation to the character of God, the pious affections, and the practical virtues.

III. A general comparison between the doctrines of Unitarianism and Calvinism in regard to their moral tendency; embracing the views entertained by each party of the depravity of man; of conversion and divine influence; of election, particular redemption, and perseverance; the doctrines of future punishment and annihilation; and the tendency of Calvinism to suppress free inquiry, discourage the

study of the Scriptures, and retard the progress of religious knowledge.

IV. An inquiry into the sentiments of celebrated English Unitarians, with proofs, that any charges against their religious opinions, as having an immoral tendency on their lives and conduct, are groundless and unjust; and that there is the strongest evidence of their honesty, sincerity, veracity, independence, christian temper, and christian practice.

A full and mature consideration of these several topics will prepare us for the conclusion, that Calvinistic orthodoxy has no claims to the high pre-eminence to which you would raise it, either as a rational and consistent system of faith, a guardian of morals, or a promoter of piety. It will, moreover, enable every impartial inquirer to divest Unitarianism of the ill shapen, frightful garb, in which your fancy has clothed it, and to behold under that hideous covering the fair proportions, majestic nature, and commanding aspect, of a pure christian faith, where reason, and truth, and scripture, and charity combine to add dignity and grace. The conclusion it is hoped will also be very obvious, that there may be pious and good christians under both forms of faith; that it is quite as important for believers to love God and their brethren, as to have an orthodox creed; and that the rewards of salvation depend on the deeds done in the body, and the virtues that dwell in the heart, more than on the ever varying opinions that float in the mind, or the dreams that play in the fancy.

PART II.

CHRISTIAN NAME AND CHARITY.

LETTER I.

Import of the Christian Name, and the Evils of confining it to particular Sects.

SIR,

In the present letter I am to inquire into the grounds, on which you deny to Unitarians the *name of Christians*. At first view, this subject does not seem to be of much importance. Names do not alter things, and whatever any one may choose to call us, we shall still be the same. But many things derive their importance as much from their consequences, as their nature. Although names are nothing in themselves, yet when they misrepresent our motives, sentiments, and characters, they are not so trifling, or unworthy of consideration, as might at first be imagined.

Our reputation in the world depends on the opinion of others. If this opinion be perverted, or ill

founded, it will not alter our characters, but it will weaken our influence, destroy our usefulness, and thus diminish our happiness. Now this result is to us a real injury, and the more to be deprecated, as coming from so unjustifiable a source, as false opinion. And besides, although *we* are not made worse, others are, because they are prompted to indulge thoughts, give currency to reports, and be guilty of conduct, which adds nothing to their own virtues, nor to the good order of society. It is obvious, then, that there is some virtue in names, and that it is the duty of every man, who values his reputation and his rights, to assert his claims to such titles, as shall truly represent his character.

No name is more honourable, none is more endearing to every sincere follower of Christ, none is cherished by him with more sacredness, than the name of *Christian*. It is a bond of union and love, which unites the hearts of those, who are enlightened by the same truths, engaged in the same duties, encouraged by the same promises, and pressing forward with the same hopes. This bond you have attempted to sever. A large portion of the followers of Jesus, who humbly and earnestly study his Gospel, who rely implicitly on his word, who desire to bring themselves wholly in subjection to his laws, who consider him to have been commissioned from heaven to make known the will of God and the terms of salvation to men, and whose choicest consolations are derived from their faith in the divinity of his character, and the truth of his doctrines,—a large portion of

these, you would exclude from the privilege of uniting under his name, and deprive them of the consolations, blessings, and enjoyments, which such a union is calculated to ensure. Few christians, who feel the power of the religion they profess, and are sensible of their own imperfections and proneness to error, would be willing to pronounce such a sentence of exclusion. Few would presume to institute such a tribunal upon the consciences and hearts of their fellow men, and place themselves in the judgment seat of Him, before whom all "must stand or fall," and who alone has power to judge.

It is not my purpose here to inquire into the origin of the name *christian*. It was first applied to the disciples of Christ at Antioch; but whether it was originally adopted by themselves, or given by others, we are not told; nor is it of any moment. The present application of the term is the only thing with which we are concerned.

In its general use it has two significations; one relating to the *faith*, the other to the *practice*, of those to whom it is applied. You say that Unitarians cannot be "regarded as christians in any correct sense of the word." The two senses here mentioned, it is believed, are the only ones in which the word can with any propriety be used. The latter of these, indeed, is acquired and forced, and is comparatively of modern origin. It is sanctioned, however, by custom. In its correct use, the word is employed exclusively to designate those, who believe in Christ as the Messiah, and who profess to receive him as their Master

and Saviour. Why are you entitled to the name of Calvinist, or any other person to the patronymic of the leader, whom he professes to follow? Is it not from this circumstance only, because you profess to receive him as a leader? And so it is with the name of christian. All, who look up to Christ as their head, and acknowledge themselves believers in him, and subjects of his kingdom, are entitled to the christian name.

The question is therefore to be settled, whether Unitarians are among this number? You say they are not, and explain yourself in a sort of abridgment of the second, eighth, and tenth Letters of Andrew Fuller. But neither his statements, nor yours after him, have any weight on my mind. They are mere assertions, where nothing but plain facts, and manly argument, could be of any value. You cannot be ignorant, that in the sincerity of our hearts we believe in the truth and divine character of the religion of Jesus, as firmly as you, or any of your brethren; that we consider, and have infinite joy in believing, his religion to be a revelation from God; that we believe him to have performed miracles by divine power; that we receive as sacred and true every word he spoke; that his commands carry with them in our view the same authority, as the commands of God; that our hope of immortality rests wholly on the veracity of his word, and a belief in his resurrection; that we look for salvation only on the conditions he has made known; and that we believe faith, repentance, and holiness essential to all, who would

be his true followers, and be partakers of the rewards he has promised. With this knowledge of our sentiments, the question may well be asked, by what authority you have denied to us the *name* of christian? If those who have this faith, and cherish these feelings, and hold fast these hopes, are not to be called *Christians*, tell us what they are to be called.*

In regard to the second, or *popular* sense of the term, I shall not say much in this place, because it comes under topics, which will be particularly discussed hereafter. Good men, who are zealous in acquiring a knowledge of the doctrines and duties of the christian religion, and in conforming to the precepts of Christ, are called *Christians*. And are there no such among Unitarians? The person, who strives to obey the laws of the Gospel, who is habitual in the exercises of piety and devotion, loves and aids his neighbour, subdues his passions, resists temptation, proscribes hurtful pleasures, hates vice, condemns and shuns the ways of the wicked, bears up with fortitude in adversity, submits cheerfully to the will of God, is penitent for his past sins, relies on the promises of Christ, endeavours to imbibe his spirit, and walk in his steps,—every such person is cordially

* Hartley has given a very concise, and in my view, a very correct definition of the term *Christian*. “To believe the christian religion, is to believe that Moses and the prophets, Christ and his Apostles, were endued with divine authority, that they had a commission from God to act and teach as they did, and that he will verify their declarations concerning future things, and especially those concerning a future life, by the event; or, in other words, it is to receive the Scriptures as our rule of life, and the foundation of all our hopes and fears.” Hartley’s Works, Vol. II. p. 71.

acknowledged by all men, not only to deserve the name, but to sustain the *character* of a christian. And when this character is seen, no one thinks of asking what his religious creed is, before he gives him the name. Now I humbly trust, that there are as many persons of this description among Unitarians, as among other denominations. In respect to the second sense of the term, therefore, as well as the first, your harsh and ungracious sentence of exclusion is passed without a semblance of justice.*

Let us look for a moment at the process, by which you have come to your extraordinary results. You say, "he, who does not receive the doctrine of man's guilt and depravity by nature, and the doctrine of the divinity and atonement of the Son of God, and

* I cannot forbear to quote here an excellent passage from President Davies' Sermon on the *Christian Name*. It breathes a spirit of liberal feeling and enlightened charity, which may be recommended with some hope of profit to all such, as think themselves alone worthy of the name of christian. "To be a christian," says he, "is not enough now-a-days, but a man must also be something more and better; that is, he must be a strenuous bigot to this or that particular church. But where is the reason or propriety of this? I may indeed believe the same things, which Luther or Calvin believed; but I do not believe them on the authority of Luther or Calvin, but upon the sole authority of Jesus Christ, and therefore I should not call myself by their name, as one of their disciples, but by the name of Christ, whom alone I acknowledge as the author of my religion, and my only Master and Lord. If I learn my religion from one of these great men, it is indeed proper I should assume their name. If I learn it from a parliament or convocation, and make their acts and canons the rule and ground of my faith, then it is enough for me to be of the established religion, be that what it will. I may with propriety be called a mere conformist; that is my highest character; but I cannot properly be called a Christian, for a Christian learns his religion not from acts of parliament, or from the determination of councils, but from Jesus Christ and his Gospel." p. 229.

The pious and persecuted Baxter long ago expressed similar sentiments in fewer words, when he said, "I am a christian, a mere christian; of no other religion; my church is the Christian Church."

of the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit, does not receive the Gospel, and is, consequently, no Christian." And just before, you pronounce these doctrines to be "the *essence* of Christianity." And again you add, "it follows with irresistible force of evidence, to my mind, that he who rejects those fundamental truths, however respectable, virtuous, and apparently devout he may be, *rejects christianity* as really, though not under precisely the same circumstances, yet as *really* as any *Deist* ever did ; and that he cannot, with propriety, be called a Christian *in any sense*." Here then we have the substance of your charges, and the amount of your argument ; if argument, indeed, it can be called.

You have defined christianity in your own way ; you have made its essence to consist in doctrines of your own choosing, and then declared, that whoever does not receive this definition, and believe the doctrines here selected, is "no christian." But what is this to the purpose ? Your convictions may be very good in your own estimation, and may have a preponderating influence on your own mind. I am willing to allow this, and yet maintain, that it gives no authority to pronounce so solemn and unqualified a denunciation against a large class of persons, who are as sincere in their faith, and value it as dearly as you, or any other christian.

What did our Saviour mean, when he left to his followers the command, "Judge not, that ye be not judged ;" and the Apostle, when he asked, "Who art thou that judgest another ?" Did they mean,

that we should solemnly charge our brethren, who cannot think as we do, with “ rejecting christianity as really as any Deist,” or with being unworthy to “be called Christians in any sense ?” Did they not rather mean, that our imperfections should teach us to distrust ourselves, and that the daily evidences, which we have of our own mistakes, errors, and faults, should make us cautious how we assume the office of censor, in rashly condemning the opinions and motives of others ? Such is the letter and spirit of the Gospel. Let others decide how widely it differs from the letter and spirit of charges like the above.*

You call total depravity, and the other doctrines, which you enumerate, “ the *essence* of Christianity, the very life and glory of the system.” And yet, in this enumeration is not embraced a belief in the existence, attributes, and superintending providence of God, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the truth and divine authority of his word, the necessity of faith, repentance, and a holy life, nor a future

* Bishop Watson gives excellent advice on this subject of deciding for others what they shall receive as the *essence* of Christianity. “ When we speak concerning the truth of revealed religion,” he observes, “ we include not only the certainty of the divine missions of Moses and of Jesus, but the nature of the several doctrines promulgated by them to mankind. Now you may ask me what these doctrines are? I know what they are *to me*; but, pretending to no degree of infallibility, I think it safer to tell you *where* they are contained, than *what* they are. They are contained in the Bible; and if, in the reading of that Book, your sentiments concerning the doctrines of christianity should be different from those of your neighbour, or from those of the church, be persuaded on your part, that infallibility appertains as little to you, as it does to the church of which you are a member, or to any individual, who differs from you.” *Charge delivered to the Clergy in the Diocese of Llandaff, June, 1795,*

state of just retribution. Now supposing the doctrines which you bring together, are true; how is it possible for them to comprise the *essence* of the christian religion, without these fundamental articles? Take these away, and what will remain? Surely nothing. Your *essence* itself depends on the truth of these. But every doctrine, which you have combined to form this *essence*, might be blown to the winds, and still these great principles of christian faith, piety, righteousness, and hope, would remain the same, impose the same obligations to obedience and right practice, open the same vivid prospects of future glory to the righteous, and of future suffering and despair to the wicked.

Such are the nature and grounds of your severe judgment, respecting the faith and claims of Unitarians. Let us trace this rule of judging to some of its applications. It as effectually deprives all other denominations, except Presbyterians, of the faith and name of christians, as it does Unitarians. If you are consistent, and adhere to your rule, you can never give the title of christians to Hopkinsians, Arminians, Catholics, Baptists, Methodists, nor indeed to any sect, which differs from the one, whose creed you embrace. For the whole amount of all you have said on the subject, proves Unitarians not to be Christians for this one reason, and this alone, namely, that they deviate from *your* standard. Others may come nearer the mark, and then they will be nearer to being christians, but will not be entirely such, and consequently cannot be called such, till

they look at all things from the same position as yourself, and see them in the same shape, colour, and dimensions. “It is a censorious and perverse fancy,” says Watts, “to pronounce a man *no christian*, because every thought of his soul, and all the atoms of his brain, are not ranged in the same posture with mine.”*

Now, I beg you will reflect for a moment, and reflect seriously, on the deplorable consequences to which this will lead. It is true, you have declared, “that you give to Unitarians what you are willing to receive from them.” That is, as you call them no christians, you are willing they should call you the same. This is certainly fair. It is quite obvious, that we have just as much right as any others to select a set of doctrines, and declare that they constitute the *essence* of christianity; and we, and all christians, have an equal right to call others hard names for not receiving, what we decide to be these essential doctrines.

But look at the consequences. The Catholics may call you no christian for not believing in the Seven Sacraments, for rejecting the doctrine of the real presence, denying the virtue of extreme unction, the use of the cross in baptism, the apostolical vicarship of the Pope, and for many other things, in which they think you have wofully departed from the true faith, and for which you are justly to be ranked among heretics. The Hopkinsians may call you no christian for what they consider your fundamental errors,

* Causes of Uncharitableness, ¶ 1.

respecting the origin and nature of sin, the nature of holiness, the consequences of Adam's transgression, the extent of the atonement, the influence of the Holy Spirit, and the ground of justification. The Arminians may do the same for what they think your unscriptural and irrational doctrines of absolute decrees, total depravity, and imputed sin. The Baptists may take from you the name of christian, because, in their view, you hold to a dangerous error respecting one of the sealing ordinances of the christian religion, and have never been properly initiated into the visible church of Christ. Nay, more, each and every one of these different sects, and of all the sects in Christendom, may insist, that all the others have no right or title to the christian name, and are to be regarded as maintaining such "dreadful," and "soul-destroying errors," that they ought to be excluded from all communion and fellowship with true christians.

Such is the practical result of the principle by which you profess to be guided. All sects think their doctrines as important and necessary, as you think yours; and just as much as you differ from them, they believe you to have wandered from the true christian faith. Suppose them all to take the liberty, which you have done, and fall to writing and preaching against the propriety of calling one another christians. Is it possible that any good purpose can be answered by such a course? Would it strengthen peace, harmony, love, and social order among men? Would it be in accordance with the

heavenly precepts of the Gospel, and the holy example of the Saviour? In these childish freaks of calling names, and in denying to others the appellation of Christians, which they claim and value, is there much of the meekness of wisdom, much of the magnanimity of a generous mind, much of the candour, forbearance, and brotherly kindness, which are at the very foundation of all rational piety, and social religious duty? Would they help to kindle a ray of goodness in the heart, or call forth a particle of love to God, or love to man? So far from it, that a means could not be devised, by which the seeds of discord would be scattered more profusely, or be made to spring up with more riotous luxuriance.

Your rule will, also, exclude from the pale of the church, many of the ablest advocates of the christian scheme. Will you deny the name of christians to men, who have employed the best part of their lives, and all their talents and learning, in proving the truth of the christian religion, defending it against the cavils of infidelity, and endeavouring to establish its principles in the minds and hearts of all? This would be equally a glaring solecism in language, and an act of injustice to the memory of the great and good. It is, nevertheless, what this rule demands.

It is a truth well worthy of observation, and one on which we may be permitted to dwell in the present connexion, that many of the ablest and most distinguished advocates of christianity have been Unitarians. And it is a fact equally notorious, that a larger number of them, than of any other single de-

nomination, have written expressly on this subject. The name of Lardner is another name for piety, talents, learning. Few men have been distinguished for higher and sounder attainments; few have been more illustrious for the rare assemblage of virtues, which adorned their characters; and none, it may safely be said, *none* has investigated so patiently and thoroughly the whole grounds of christianity. Of his candour, sincerity, love of truth, and judicious zeal, it is sufficient proof, that his work is universally quoted by christians of all persuasions, as the very first in our language, or in any language, on this subject. It is a standard to which all refer, the storehouse from which succeeding writers have derived their amplest treasures. Yet Lardner was a Unitarian, and according to your mode of judging, no christian. That is, the man, who is universally allowed to have combined a greater number of qualifications, than any other, for the inquiry, and to have been more successful than any other in establishing the truth of christianity, is himself to be denied the name of christian!

The same remark will apply, with different degrees of force, to all Unitarians, who have written in defence of the christian religion. The learned and pious Dr. Samuel Clarke is no longer to be called a christian, notwithstanding the powerful defence of christian truth, contained in his celebrated Lectures. Priestley, also, wrote largely on the evidences of christianity. Few writers have taken up the argument on so large a scale, or traced it with so much perspi-

cuity and minuteness through all its bearings. Infidelity has never been met by a more formidable opponent. If there is less of condensed method and rigid logic in his arguments, than in those of some other writers, he is certainly unequalled in the fertility of his topics, his ingenious illustration, and in that lucid, persuasive mode of writing, which conducts the mind irresistibly to the point at which he aims. This was a subject in which he felt a peculiar, and a serious interest. It employed his youthful pen, and engaged the labours of his latest years. But notwithstanding a life thus spent in proving the truth, and impressing the importance of the christian religion, it is at length discovered, that Priestley was no christian!

Look back to the famous controversy, which sprung from a vain and subtle philosophy, and which was at its height a century ago in England. Who were the men, that laboured most successfully in baffling the talents, ingenuity, and learning, of Tindal, Bolingbroke, Chubb, Morgan, Collins, and their numerous coadjutors ? By far the most able opponents of these philosophers were Unitarians. Read Dr. Clarke's early *Reflections on Toland's Amyntor*, and his powerful *Answer to Collins* at a maturer age ; read Chandler's *Defence of the Christian Religion* in reply to Collins, which was highly commended by Archbishop Secker ; read James Foster's eloquent *Defence of the Christian Revelation against Tindal* ; read in Benson's *Reasonableness*, and in his *Reflections*, not only a confutation of the principal arguments of Deism, but an able defence of the christian scheme ; read Whiston and Lowman against Collins.

and Lowman against Morgan; read bishop Clayton against Bolingbroke ;—read these writings, and others of a similar kind, which will readily come to your recollection, and then tell us whether christianity owes nothing to Unitarians. Whoever will pursue the subject with candour and impartiality, will acknowledge, that no class of writers has done more to neutralize the poison of infidelity, or to establish on a firm foundation the kingdom of the Saviour. These are the men to whom you deny the name of christians.

Bishop Hoadly defended with great ability the truth and divinity of the Christian religion, in his letter to Fleetwood on Miracles, in his treatise on the ancient Prophets, and particularly in his *Queries* occasioned by Collins's Discourse of Free Thinking. His extraordinary powers were never employed with more earnestness, or effect, than on these subjects.*

The Rev. John Jackson, distinguished for the part he took in the Bangorian Controversy, and for his defence of Clarke against Waterland, engaged in support of the evidences of christianity. He wrote against Tindal and Collins, and in proof of revealed religion from miracles and prophecy in answer to Morgan.

The learned Joseph Hallet published several articles against Woolston, Morgan, Chubb, particularly on the miracles of our Saviour.†

* Hoadly's Works, vol. I. p. 5, 107, 143.

† Hallet's Notes and Discourses, Vol. II. p. 175.

Caleb Hemming distinguished himself in the same work, in the midst of numerous other labours in the cause of christian truth and piety. He wrote against Chubb, against the arguments of deism generally, and in favour of the christian miracles.

Wakefield also wrote a treatise on the evidences of christianity.*

Michael Dodson, the learned translator of Isaiah, although a layman, did much service to christianity by his writings. He was a man of exemplary piety, a lover of truth and freedom, of great mildness and humanity of disposition, and in all respects of uncommon excellence of character. Yet Dodson, as well as Hoadly, Jackson, Hallet, Hemming, and Wakefield, was a Unitarian, and, according to your rule of judging, neither he, nor they, are to be ranked among christians.†

In your Sermon you speak of Locke as a christian ; but you certainly cannot suppose the definition of this

* See a work entitled, *Evidences of Christianity, or a Collection of Remarks intended to display the Excellence, recommend the Purity, illustrate the Character, and evince the Authenticity, of the Christian Religion.* By Gilbert Wakefield.

† Dodson resided in London, and was among the first, who associated with Mr. Lindsey in opening a Unitarian place of worship in Essex Street. He was early a member of the "Society for promoting the Knowledge of the Scriptures," formed in 1783. He wrote several articles in the two volumes of *Commentaries and Essays* published by that Society. Among others furnished by him were translations of parts of Isaiah with notes. These were specimens of his future work, which appeared in 1790, entitled, "A New Translation of Isaiah, with Notes supplementary to those of Dr. Lowth, late Bishop of London, and containing Remarks on many Parts of his Translation and Notes."

The specimens first published in 1784 were approved by Bishop Lowth in a complimentary note to the author.

term, which is contained in your Reply, will apply to the sentiments of Locke. I shall pass over the question for the present, which you have raised, respecting his Unitarian sentiments. I will only remark, that when you expressed an opinion so decidedly opposed to universal belief, it would have been quite proper to give some reasons. And Locke must still be considered a Unitarian, till he can be proved a Trinitarian; a task, which it is not likely you will soon undertake. At all events, he had no faith in the assemblage of articles, which you denominate the *essence* of christianity, and without believing which, you say, no one can be called a christian. His whole treatise on the Reasonableness of Christianity bears witness to this truth. For the leading object of that work is to show, that "the Gospel was written to induce men into a belief of this proposition, 'that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah,' which if they believed, they should have life."* He says nothing about total depravity, the atonement, the "sanctifying spirit of an Almighty Surety," nor any of your peculiar doctrines. Yet who has done more to elucidate the sacred Scriptures, or to prove the consistency and reasonableness of the religion of Jesus? Your rule, however, will take from him the christian name.

Examples of Unitarians, who have been zealous and able defenders of the christian faith, might be multiplied. Bonnet of Geneva is a memorable one

* Reasonableness of Christianity, sec. ix.

He has stated the argument with great compass of thought, and philosophical precision. I do not say, that Paley was a Unitarian, but I believe he was, because I have seen nothing in his writings, which indicates the contrary. Several Unitarians now living, both in England and this country, have written on the evidences of christianity with such earnestness, force of reasoning, and eloquence, as do equal credit to their zeal, their piety, talents, and love of truth.

Many instances might be adduced among Unitarian writers of the present day in England, which prove their zeal and labours in the cause of christian truth. One will be sufficient in this place. Mr. Belsham's "Summary view of the Evidence and practical Importance of the christian Revelation," contains a brief and comprehensive statement of the principal evidences of christianity, expressed in the author's usually perspicuous style. He deduces his proofs from the testimony of the Jewish Scriptures, from history, miracles, and the internal evidence of the christian revelation; and concludes with many excellent remarks on the practical influence of the christian doctrines.

Among the Unitarians of this country, there has been no want of writers in defence of christianity. Let me refer you particularly to Dr. Channing's "Lecture on the Evidences of Revealed Religion," delivered before the University at Cambridge. Where have you seen the argument from miracles stated with more clearness, ingenuity and force; more earnestness and ability; where have you witnessed

more sincerity and religious fervour, or a warmer zeal in establishing the truth and divinity of the revealed doctrines of Jesus? Read, also, Dr. Channing's two sermons on Infidelity, published some years before, in which the most popular arguments against the christian religion are considered and answered. Read Mr. Everett's learned work entitled a "Defence of Christianity;" and Mr. Cary's writings on the same subject. Examine a brief and logical argument by Dr. Freeman, relating to the early historical proofs of christianity. Read Mr. Colman on the miraculous character of Christ, and Mr. Ed-dowes on the fulfilment of the prophecies in the coming of the Messiah. Read the General Repository and the Christian Disciple; read the sermons of the lamented Anthony Forster; read almost any work, in fact, written by a Unitarian, and you will find more or less indirect confirmation of the truth of the christian religion.

Such have been the labours of Unitarians in this country during the short space of ten years. What have the orthodox done in the mean time? We often hear them deprecating the ravages of infidelity, but where shall we look for the barriers, which they have raised to oppose its progress? Have they done as much in a century? Show us the evidence.

Besides, let us not forget the pious labours of two or three others, although they were performed at an earlier period. Where has been a more popular tract, than Dr. John Clarke's small treatise on the evidences of christianity? It has been through many

editions in England and this country. It is now a standard work for distribution among Unitarians, as well as Trinitarians. Read Buckminster's Sermons, and acknowledge, that eloquence and piety have seldom been combined in a more eminent degree in supporting the truths, and defending the divinity of the christian religion. It must be remembered, however, that Clarke and Buckminster were Unitarians. Let me add, also, that the Unitarians of this country have published and circulated Hartley's work on the Truth of the Christian Religion, and teach in their schools the popular treatises of Grotius, Butler, Paley, and Porteus. Such are the proofs on which some of their zealous orthodox brethren build the charge, that they are no christians.*

I will mention only one example more, and this of comparatively early date. It is that of Socinus. His treatise, on the Authority of the Sacred Scriptures, was translated into several languages, and read and admired throughout all Europe. Grotius is said to have drawn largely from this work: and it was highly praised even by an English Bishop. The cause of christianity has seldom been more ably advocated, than in this little treatise. The author reasons like one, who felt the importance of the subject. His arrangement is not always the most happy, but

* See the Unitarian Miscellany, Vol. I. p. 213, 311.—Dr. Freeman's Sermons, Third Edition, p. 70.—Eddowes's Sermons, p. 65.—Colman's Sermons, p. 71.—Professor Everett's Defence of Christianity.—Buckminster's Sermons, p. 1, 22.

his arguments are condensed and forcible. They display the workings of a powerful mind, striving to substantiate and impress the important truths of the christian religion. But all this is nothing with you. The mode of judging, which you have adopted, excludes him, as well as all the other illustrious defenders of the faith, whom I have mentioned, from the privilege of even having the *name* of christians.*

I have dwelt the longer on this point, to show the extreme absurdity of your rule. The men themselves, in whom christianity has found its firmest and most zealous supporters, and who have employed their best powers in proving its truth and value, are *not to be considered worthy of the christian name!* What shall we think of principles which lead to such a result?

Emlyn has a pointed and forcible argument on this subject. Every one knows how much he suffered for his faith by persecution, fines, and imprisonment. In the midst of these afflictions, which he was compelled to endure on account of his constancy in adhering to what he deemed a true christian belief, he

* The treatise-*De Auctoritate Sacrae Scripturæ* was first published in 1570, without the name of the author. An edition was afterwards published at Seville, by Ferrerius, a Jesuit, who intimated in the preface that he was the author; but he was detected, from having advanced sentiments in that place contrary to those in the work itself. It was at length published with the author's name, translated into Dutch and French, and printed in different parts of Europe. It was translated into English by E. Coombe, a clergyman of the Church of England, and published in 1731. This statement of facts is sufficient evidence of the high estimation in which it was held. Vorstius published it with notes, and also with remarks of certain Divines of Basil. It is found in Latin among the writings of Socinus, in the first volume of the *Bibliotheca Fratrum Polonorum*. p. 265.

was assailed with the charge of being *no christian*. He thus replies to his opponent.

"Can you justify your rashness in saying, that Unitarians are not christians, when, to be a christian, is to own the authority, and receive the doctrine of Christ according to their best judgment, which, one might think, a charity as little as yours might readily grant they do, who in their belief go against all temporal motives, and bear the heavy wrath of their persecutors? Do they not worship the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? The same God that the Apostles worshipped, *who bowed their knees to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ?*

"Nay, do they not worship the same God, that our Lord Christ himself, our great pattern, worshipped? And are they not christians in their worship, who worship as Christ himself did? I pray, who are christians, if not these? Did he not say, *My God and your God*; that is, you must have and own the same God with me; or, you and I have the same object of our faith and joy? Do you pretend to show, that even Jesus Christ worshipped a Son, or a Holy Ghost? Show it, and they will imitate him. In the mean time, if having just the same God and object of supreme worship, as the man Christ Jesus had, must make them *not christians*, they envy not any who claim the name of the *only christians* on the contrary ground."*

This is the reasoning of a man, who spoke from experience and feeling, as well as from Scripture,

* Emlyn's Works, Vol. II. p. 93.

conscience, nature, and common sense. It shows in a strong light the folly of denying the name of christian to those, who imitate the Saviour and Apostles in their faith and worship, and who do not hesitate to suffer any calamity for the sake of that very name, which the officious charity of their brethren would take from them.

In short, there seems to be something extremely positive and dogmatical in selecting any definite number of doctrines, and calling them the essence of christianity, and in passing on all persons not receiving them the censure of exclusion from the christian name and fellowship. It is hardly possible, for any one to do this, without assuming it as an immutable principle, that he stands on the unassailable eminence of truth. It is natural enough, that every person should think himself right, and all the rest of the world wrong; but it requires a great stretch of confidence in one's own opinions to induce him to set himself up as a universal judge, and to endeavour to wrest that liberty from another, which is inherent in his moral nature.

This, in protestant countries, is going much beyond popish infallibility. The Pope traces back his descent from the Apostles, and believes in the continually guiding influence of the Great Head of the Church, in preserving the true faith among men. According to the Catholic system, there is some reason for believing in the infallibility of men, who are thought to be divinely appointed, as depositaries of the true faith. Protestants have given up this no-

tion, and now *to act on it*, is absurd.* Chillingworth has pertinently said; “Require of christians only to believe Christ, and to call no man master but him only; let those leave claiming infallibility, that have no title to it; and let them, that in their words disclaim it, disclaim it likewise in their actions.” If we must have dictators in faith, let us go back to Popes and Councils. We shall then at least have the advantage of antiquity and numbers. But while we profess to walk in the light and liberty of conscience, and to call no man master but Christ, let us think, and reason, and judge for ourselves, and not dictate to others. Let us act the part of fallible, as well as rational and accountable beings.

It is a bold and unjustifiable assumption of authority in any one, to decide on the faith of another, or to declare whether this other believes enough to be called a christian. It is a case, which is exclusively concerned with the conscience and conviction of the individual. Whoever is confident, that he has made the best exertions of which he is capable, and examined with seriousness, sincerity, a firm reliance on di-

* In reading some parts of your Reply, one is forcibly reminded of a Dedication to the Pope, prefixed to a satirical piece written by Sir Richard Steele. “The most sagacious persons,” says the writer in addressing the Pope, “have not been able to discover any other difference between us, as to the main principle of all doctrine, government, worship, and discipline, but this one, that you *cannot* err in any thing you determine, and we *never do*. That is, in other words, you are **INFALLIBLE**, and we are **ALWAYS IN THE RIGHT**. We cannot but esteem the advantage to be exceedingly on our side in this case, because we have *all the benefits of infallibility, without the absurdity of pretending to it*, and without the uneasy task of maintaining a point so shocking to the understanding of men.”

vine aid, and a proper sense of the importance of the subject, and then confesses himself to be a christian; or, in other words, whoever is conscientious in holding what he believes to be a true christian faith,— every such person is entitled to the name, and it is equally an encroachment on the claims of christian liberty, and the rights of conscience, to attempt to take it from him. It is in violation of the laws of peace, without sanction in the instructions and example of Christ, and in no accordance with the spirit of the Gospel.

LETTER II.

On Charity, as explained in the Scriptures, and practised by the first Christians.

SIR,

WE come now to discuss a very important branch of christian faith and duty. We are to inquire into the nature and extent of that *Charity*, which the Saviour so repeatedly urged on his followers, and which the Apostles never ceased to inculcate. The common notions on this subject you think incorrect. There is a belief, you say, that “charity consists in entertaining a favourable opinion of others, however widely they may differ from us on the most essential

points; in supposing, that they have inquired after truth as candidly as we have done; and in taking for granted, that there is as much reason to hope they will finally be accepted of God, as that we ourselves shall be accepted." To this sense of the term you take great exceptions, and affirm, that "though current enough in common society, among a thousand other popular crudities, it is certainly not found in Scripture, and ought to receive no countenance from any accurate thinker." By this it seems, that the mass of mankind are mistaken respecting one of the fundamental principles of the christian religion.

We proceed to consider your mode of rectifying this mistake. Let us commence with your definition— "The word charity, as used in Scripture is equivalent to the word *love*. To exercise charity towards another, in the language of the Bible, is to love him. I may, therefore, exercise the most perfect charity towards one, whose principles I reprobate, and whose conduct I abhor, and ought to abhor." Before I examine the merits of this definition, as founded on the language and spirit of Scripture, allow me to ask one or two questions. You make the term *charity* exactly synonymous with *love*. When you speak of loving a man, what is the specific object of your affection? Is not this comprised in such of his moral qualities, as come within your notice, and gain your approbation? Take a man's principles and his conduct away, and what is left, which you can either love or hate? His principles are interwoven with all the moral elements of his nature, and his conduct

is the only test we can have of the rectitude and purity of his motives ; or, in other words, the principles and the conduct constitute the whole moral man. Now, what kind of love is that, which is extended to a person, whose principles are to be reprobated, and whose conduct is to be abhorred ? Surely not the love of a virtuous, pious mind. Such a mind can love only virtue and piety. Hence the very terms of your definition prove its looseness and fallacy, and suggest the necessity of a virtue essentially different in its operations from the general principle of love ; a virtue, by which the compassion and good affections of our nature may be brought into exercise, in favour even of the unprincipled and the vicious, whom we cannot in any proper sense of the word *love*, except in proportion as we are willing to dispense with holiness and virtue in ourselves.

And again, on the principles of Calvinism it is impossible for the *charity*, which you define, to be extended to any but a very small part of the human race. How can a good man *love* any of his fellow beings, who are under a sentence of eternal reprobation by an unalterable decree of God, who are totally depraved, destitute of all good and wholly inclined to all evil, whose every deed is wickedness, and whose every thought is rebellion against their Maker ? If this be possible, it is a mystery in ethics, which I confess my inability to solve. No good man could love such beings, because every thing in them must be wicked, odious, and repulsive. He might, even under these circumstances, have for them a fellow feeling,

or an affection, which the world have united in calling *charity*, because this dreadful condition would not be their fault, but their misfortune in having been born into the world. Calvinism, therefore, requires something more, than your general virtue of love, unless it would teach its advocates to withhold all civility and kindness from the great mass of men, who were either brought into the world by the Deity with the express purpose of making them eternally miserable, or who have not yet been released from the bondage of their inherent depravity by a miraculous visitation of divine grace.

But these distinctions, you will say, perhaps, are “popular crudities,” the pastimes of erring reason, which may be well enough in common use, but are not sanctioned by the Scriptures, and “ought to receive no countenance from any accurate thinker.” That charity requires us to think favourably of the opinions of our brethren, to suppose them sincere and conscientious in the search of truth, and to indulge a hope, that they may be in a fair way of meeting the divine acceptance, you consider a vulgar notion, and “assert with confidence,” that it makes no part of the true Scripture doctrine. This was a point of much importance in your apology, or defence, for if your position can be made out, then it follows, that Unitarians are beside themselves to imagine any want of charity in those, who, in their kind solicitude, call them heretics, utter anathemas against their opinions, and in the spirit of christian love console them with the comforting declarations, that they are not chris-

tians at all, and no more in the way of salvation than Mohammedans and Jews, that they cling to “dreadful, soul destroying errors,” and in their morals are to be numbered among the loose and licentious, upon whose lives religion has no purifying power. These are all to be taken as the genuine fruits of *charity*, since it is made to appear, that they may be accompanied with a due degree of scriptural *love*.

Let us come now to the primary object of inquiry, and endeavour to ascertain what the Scriptures teach respecting the virtue of *charity*, and whether it be not allowable to exercise this virtue towards the sincere *opinions* of our fellow christians.

When you say, that “in the language of Scripture *charity* is equivalent to the word *love*,” I know not what you mean, unless it be that the original Greek word, which denotes the general principle of love, is sometimes rendered into English by the word *charity*. This is not denied. It proves nothing, however, except that there was no term in Greek exactly corresponding to the word *charity* in English. The meaning of the Greek word is to be determined, like the meaning of almost every other word, not by assigning to it an arbitrary, undeviating signification, but by the connexion in which it stands; and this is no difficult thing. Such an attempt at induction might have amazed the schoolmen, and confounded Aquinas himself, but since the days of Locke and Reid the province of thought is too well understood, and the principles of language are too easily apprehended, to admit of difficulties in this process. It is

a rule as old as Hilary, that the force of words depends on their sense, and not on their sound. *Verba non sono sed sensu sapiunt.* This rule is not to be deserted in the Scriptures.

Schleusner, whose accuracy and discrimination will not be called in question by any Biblical scholar, has assigned no less than six distinct significations to the word of which we are now speaking. I will not enumerate these, but mention three only, which will be sufficient to show the incorrectness of your statement.

First, it means the *general principle of love*, or “an invariable preference of Good,” as this principle is defined by a late acute and philosophical writer.* This is the kind of love, which the Deity exercises towards his rational creatures, and which they are capable of exercising towards him. The word always implies this sense, when it is used to denote the love of God.

Secondly, it sometimes means *alms-giving, or the conferring of benefits*. St. Paul praises the Thessalonians for their *labour of love*, or their kind offices in relieving his wants and ministering to his comfort. He says to the Hebrews, “God is not unrighteous to forget your work and *labour of love*, which ye have showed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister.” Here the Apostle alludes to their kindness in contributing to the temporal necessities of the persons, who had laboured among them in the ministry. In both cases the

* Cogan’s Philosophical Treatise on the Passions, p. 25.

word has the sense of charity, as we use the term to denote alms-giving.*

Thirdly, a meaning of the word, which is by far the most frequent in the New Testament, is that *embracing the thoughts, feelings, and actions of men in their intercourse with one another*. This is the charity, which the Apostle says is greater than faith or hope, and which is so beautifully described in the thirteenth chapter of the first epistle to the Corinthians. It is that virtue, which displays itself in active deeds of benevolence, gentleness, mercy; which teaches us humility, forbearance, and a just sense of the wants and the deserts of our fellow men; and which, in short, preserves and regulates the order of society, by restraining the passions, and bringing out the good qualities of our nature. It is a virtue arising entirely out of the condition of men, their mutual dependence, and the necessity of reciprocal benefits. If human nature were perfect, if we had neither faults nor wants, such a virtue could not exist.

* As most of the valuable Manuscripts, and all the ancient Greek commentators, omit the word *αγαπη*, *labour*, in the text last quoted, Peirce, in accordance with Mill, thinks it was not written in the original. But, as he justly observes, the sense will not be altered by leaving it out. And he adds, “What the *love* was they showed, the Apostle more fully declares, Heb. x. 33, 34. A very delicate way he takes here to commend the kindness they had shown him, by representing it to have been done out of respect for God himself.” *Peirce in Loc.* For a parallel example of the bounty of the Philippians, see Phil. iv. 18.

The word, *αγαπη*, appears to be used in a similar sense, 1 Thess. v. 13. “Esteem them very highly *in love* for their work’s sake.” That is, take care to make proper returns for their labours by your deeds of bounty and charity; or, as Schleusner paraphrases it, *liberalitati in sustentandis et alendis doctori-bus studete.*

That there is a broad and strongly marked distinction between the three meanings here noticed, is manifest on the slightest inspection. The same thing will be confirmed by comparing the properties of the virtue under each signification. No use of language will allow you to speak of the charity of God. The duties, which men owe to one another, or the duties of charity, have no relation, either to the character or the actions of the Supreme Being; nor have they any concern in our relations to him. We cannot be *charitable* to God, although we may and ought to *love* him. In giving alms, our *charity* may prompt us to relieve the distresses of a man, whose infamy and vices utterly forbid the exercise of *love*. We may comply with the commands of our Saviour, and have *charity* for our enemies in both of the two latter senses above mentioned, but we have not power to do so much violence to human nature, as to *love* them in the first sense, while we know they are our enemies, and resolved to do us an injury when an opportunity shall offer.

But there is no occasion to dwell on this point. Nothing can be more clear than these distinctions, and I have only designed to show by a few hints with what disregard of all critical precision you spoke, when you “asserted with confidence,” that the word *charity* means precisely the same thing as the word *love*, and with what a fallacious and unscriptural principle you started, in laying down the rules of conduct, which should be followed by christians of different persuasions in regard to each other.

Love is a principle, charity a virtue ; love is an inclination to good, charity is active goodness; love is an involuntary emotion, charity a duty ; love is an original affection, making a part of our nature, and communicated by the Deity himself, charity is a rule of moral action, founded on our condition in the world, and limited to our intercourse with men ; love is a disposition of the mind, charity an act of the will, bringing this disposition to bear on particular objects ; love can be excited only towards what is good, charity can never be extended to positive excellence, but is confined to the frailty, faults, wants, and sufferings of men. Do you say, after all, that charity is only a modification of love ? Let this be admitted, and it will prove them not be the same thing. Every virtue is a modification of this principle, yet every virtue is not love. All the moral attributes of the Deity are but so many modifications of his love, but will you say that his goodness, justice, mercy, wisdom are all synonymous with love, and consequently with each other ? Piety, reverence, thanksgiving, and praise to our Maker, and also benevolence, tenderness, sympathy, generosity, compassion, lenity, are all modifications of this general principle ; and it would be just as correct a use of language to say, that each of these virtues is equivalent to love, as it is to say the same of charity.

Your rule may be applied to all other words in the New Testament, as well as to the one which is translated love and charity. Take, for instance, the word, which is usually rendered *righteousness*. In the ori-

ginal it means *justice*. There is, nevertheless, a very striking difference between these two words in our language. No man can be righteous without being just, but justice alone would be accounted a very small part of righteousness. Justice implies nothing more, than rendering to every man his just due, while righteousness embraces all the virtues of piety and morality, and is nearly the same as holiness. Your rule would require you to say, that as the word righteousness, "as used in Scripture," is equivalent to the word justice, nothing more is demanded of you to be a righteous man, than to be just, and that to pretend to any distinction here is one of the "popular crudities," which "ought to receive no countenance from any accurate thinker." By the same process, and without continuing your philology much farther, you might fall into the track of Horne Tooke, and convince yourself, that whatever is *commanded*, is right and just, and thus discover the only reason, which perhaps has ever been given, why the commands, or in other words, the decisions, creeds, and decrees of councils, conventions, assemblies, and synods should be binding on the consciences and faith of christians.

Numerous examples of this sort might be recurred to, which would give additional proof of the error of your theory, and the mischievous tendency of its application.* On the whole, few things are more evi-

* The word, *πνεῦμα*, *spirit*, Schleusner calls *πνευματικός*, and assigns to it no less than *twenty six* distinct classes of significations, as it is used in the New Testament. Among others are life, breath, air, wind; the soul, the mind; a divine influence, the invisible and extraordinary gifts of the Deity. It would be as proper to say, that either of these is equivalent to the principal one, and

dent, than that this notion of charity, by which you attempt to smooth down the rough features of your charges, receives as little support from the Scriptures, as from the understanding, the prevailing sentiments, and the best feelings of men.

It is, moreover, fraught with many evils. If admitted in explaining the Scriptures, it would introduce utter confusion, and make the plainest things in the word of God ambiguous, and unintelligible. If carried into practice, it would have a most serious, and unhappy influence on the temper, morals, and character of christians. It virtually teaches, that all the moral qualities and exercises may be resolved into the general principle of *love*. For if charity means love, so does benevolence, and so do generosity, sympathy, tenderness, mercy; and the numerous duties, which these rules of virtue, and in fact, all rules of virtue, require, may be dispensed with, if you can satisfy yourself, that you have abundance of love. It is true, this happy simplicity in the great science of morals would relieve us from the grievance of thinking favourably of opinions, which do not in all respects accord with our own. It would leave no tax on our humility, our good nature, our love of truth, or desire for the progress of christian knowledge. There would be no occasion for these virtues, in dealing with our brethren, while the only thing requisite was a due caution not to resist the mechanical impulse of love. Unfortunately for this scheme,

that the word may *always* be understood in any one of these significations, as it is in your example of love and charity.

no such simplicity exists, either in the Scriptures, in the laws of human nature, or the sense of mankind.

I consider it established, therefore, that your views of this subject are erroneous, and that men have not been unwittingly duped into such a “crudity,” as you imagine, in consenting to make it a christian duty to have some respect for the serious endeavours, the anxious inquiries, and honest opinions of such, as have not been able to run in precisely the same path as themselves. In what I have further to say, it will be considered as settled, that there is such a virtue as charity, distinct from all other virtues, and that this is taught in the Scriptures. I have only to make a few remarks on the *unreasonableness, danger, and evils* of neglecting this virtue, and blotting it, as you would seem to do, out of the catalogue of christian duties.

Charity has its origin, as we have seen, in the imperfections of men. It supposes defects and faults, not as implying crime, or designed offence, or wilful perversion of the gifts of heaven. The ignorance, prejudices, and errors of honest men, arise out of their weakness, and not out of a disposition to evil. No man errs in sincere opinion against his judgment, or sense of right. In practice he may err against these, and also against truth, conscience, reason. The errors of the honest man’s opinions are innocent, but the errors of the wicked man’s practice are criminal. By your principles these are confounded. This is preposterous. Wicked deeds claim neither charity, nor love, nor sufferance. Involuntary, innocent errors are identified with the imperfections of human

nature, and every one's own frailty should convince him, that they demand the kind forbearance, or in other words, the charity, of the humble and the pious.

It may be added, that to withhold charity from such errors, is to inflict an injury, and be guilty of an offence. What more can you do to injure a person, whose faith you do not approve, than to charge people to beware of his discourse and his society, to take care how they read his books, charging him with heresy, declaring his morals to be infected by his principles, and pronouncing him unworthy of the christian name ? In such a case you evidently make opinion a crime, and may thus fix a reproach on the fairest character, and scatter the seeds of malevolence in the religious affections of the unwary and the uninformed. Such insinuations and charges are worse than open slander, and public defamation, because they go abroad under the protecting garb of religion, and plead a zeal for God, even amidst their greatest enormities. They are fraught with mischief in every quarter. They testify the ill temper of the person by whom they are dispersed ; they wantonly impugn the character of the virtuous and sincere ; they deceive and corrupt the minds of the unsuspecting, and encourage the illiberal in their bitterness and unchristian revilings.

That the advocates for the kind of christian charity, which shows itself in effects like these, have always considered opinion a crime, has been thoroughly proved by the conduct of churches. Why else have

they so often brought down the terrors of excommunication upon some of their members, whose lives were irreproachable, but whose spirit of inquiry, and honest avowal of their sentiments, have excited the suspicion, that they were penetrating too deeply into the dark subtleties, and secret corners of some of the received dogmas? Why the anathemas which different churches have heaped with exhaustless bounty on others? In the midst of these imaginary works of sanctity and *love*, where is that *charity*, which “suffereth long and is kind, which doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil, rejoiceth not in iniquity, but beareth all things, and endureth all things?” She has fled to her native skies, or is hidden in the depths of the earth; she is any where, rather than in the bosoms of her pretended votaries, inflaming their mistaken zeal, and approving their unholy purposes.

Without this charity, there can be no unity of consent, feeling, or action, either among christian sects or individuals. Differences exist in matters of *opinion* and not of *action*. No sect, I believe, has ever made any peculiar or extraordinary acts of holiness the characteristics of its party. Hence, upon your scheme of loving the person, but “reprobating his principles,” every sect must reprobate every other, for as sects they differ only in regard to “principles.” This remark is not theoretical. It is verified by the example of every one, who betrays a fondness for denouncing any sect. The Rev. Dr. Brett, an Episco-

palian, in a laboured discourse to establish your favourite notion of exclusive charity, thinks it a great hardship indeed, that he may not be permitted, in what he conceives to be the true spirit of christian moderation, to condemn Socinians and Quakers, and “ those who refuse baptism to infants,” and also to call such persons schismatics, as take it upon them to “ renounce Episcopal government, and contemn the orders and services of *our* church, setting up for themselves teachers according to their own fancies, and separating themselves from *our* communion, as the Presbyterians and Independents.”* And I suppose you would think it an equal hardship, if you were denied the liberty of retorting upon Episcoplians thus charitably inclined, and of clearing yourself from the imputation of schism, and maintaining that *their* church is no true church, but a defective branch of a corrupt stock, “ setting up for itself teachers according to its own fancies,” and sadly deforming the primitive faith and discipline. This you would no doubt call moderation and charity, and you would only be following the example of Dr. Brett, and every other impugner of a faith, which differs from his own.

Trace this species of charity through its windings. To what does it come at last? It terminates in disaffections, divisions, wranglings, and all the desolating effects of the unholy passions. Let the application be

* Sermon on True Moderation, as contained in the *Churchman armed against the Errors of the Times*, Vol. iii. p. 12.

more particular. No two men think alike. Opinions are as various as the objects of thought. The whole christian world is made up of persons, whose opinions are tinged with every shade, from the brilliant light of truth to the blackest darkness of error. What individual of the whole number can have the good fortune to be favoured with your charity ? In accordance with your notion, the exercise of this virtue must be restricted to him alone, whose opinions are like your own. But where shall this person be found? At a certain point your charity will begin, but where is this point? In how many things must there be an agreement, and what are these things? Till this be fairly established, the conclusion of the whole matter is, you can have no charity for any man but yourself. This scheme implies an unavailing attempt to force nature. When you can make all the trees of the forest shoot forth leaves of the same texture, shape, and colour ; when every blossom and every spire of grass shall exactly resemble every other ; when every man's features, form, and dimensions shall be alike ; and all minds shall have the same degree of wisdom, intelligence, and strength, then the fond dream of producing uniformity of opinion will be realized, and then, and not before, some straggling beams of your charity may go abroad, to look for other objects than yourself to act upon.*

* Some excellent reflections on this topic may be seen in the Rev. Dr. Channing's "Remarks on the Rev. Dr. Worcester's Second Letter to him on American Unitarianism." p. 24.

Universal experience has also taught lessons, which it is impossible for us to forget. Persecutions, proscriptions, wars, murders, have been the bitter and detestable fruits of the insane zeal, which the spirit of uncharitableness, not as exercised towards the *practices*, but the *opinions* of men, has kindled and nourished in the breasts of the ignorant, the bigoted, the ambitious, the hypocritical, in every age of the christian church. Men have sanctified the most infamous purposes, by cloaking their crimes under the pretence of suppressing heresy, and protecting the faith. There is not a deeper blot in human nature, nor a more glaring outrage upon reason, nor a stronger verification of the maxim, *humanum est errare et insanire*, than the treatment, which christians have offered to one another, simply because they could not agree in opinion. By their cruelties, they have done as much as the power of man could do to exterminate one half of the world, and make hypocrites of the other. Do you suppose the number of heretics in France, and of Jews in Spain and Portugal, was diminished by the barbarous laws made against them, and by the bloody orgies of the Inquisition? No. Hypocrites were multiplied, every wicked passion was fanned into a flame, and the prayers of the sufferers ascended to heaven, mingled with imprecations of vengeance on their relentless persecutors.

All this was done, let it be remembered, without sacrificing a particle of that *love*, which you describe as the essence of charity. Nay, so far from it, that a *love for the souls of men* was frequently made the pri-

mary cause of the vilest persecutions. This was love without charity, and these were its genuine fruits. The topic of persecution is too trite to need enlargement. It is enough for you to cast upon it a single glance, and then recollect, that the principle which you would establish, and under which you would shelter your charges of heresy and immorality against Unitarians, is the same, which has ministered to the rage of fanaticism, the cupidity of avarice, the lust of unprincipled ambition, and the tortures of cruelty.

These hints are not introduced with the supposition, that such abuses are any longer to be apprehended, but only to show what have actually been the consequences where your principle has operated to its fullest extent. *Opinions*, and not *actions*, have invariably been the food of the consuming fire of persecution. A proper charity for such opinions, would have extinguished the devouring flame, spared the lives of the innocent, and raised the white banner of peace, instead of the bloody flag of death and desolation. The principle will for ever remain the same, and be equally opposed to the pure spirit of christianity. It may stop short of actual persecution, not for the want of a latent disposition, but of power, and the approbation of public sentiment.

The days of persecution with fire and sword, it is to be hoped, and perhaps believed, have run their course. They have settled into the abyss of time, and will never again be drawn out to darken and disgrace the history of human nature. The hideous spirit of those days, whose poisonous breath infected all that was

pure in the human heart, and blasted all that was fair and lovely in the christian scheme, is powerless, subdued by the majesty of truth, and the rising strength of unperverted reason. Heaven has smiled on the land, and the chimeras, which so long brooded in the imagination, and settled upon the soul, have gradually dissolved and disappeared. If some traces of them still remain, they are like the inscriptions on the mouldering monuments of antiquity, losing something of their distinctness and form with the return of every sun. The finger of time will at length erase them, and leave a fair surface, on which shall be written, in characters that can never be defaced, the motto of all succeeding ages—*truth and christian charity.*

Again, your view of charity is at variance with the positive precepts of the Saviour. “ Judge not, that ye be not judged,” is an *imperious command*, and is enforced by the beautiful illustration, which immediately follows it, respecting the mote in a brother’s eye. Now, this command could not relate to conduct. Every one has a right, and ought to judge the *wicked deeds even* of a brother. It relates to motives, intentions, and thoughts in forming opinions. These we are not at liberty to judge, or censure, for a very plain reason, because they are beyond our reach. And we encroach upon a prerogative, which God only can claim, when we set up a tribunal to take cognizance of the consciences of men. It is a fact, which ought to be impressed on the minds, and engraven in the hearts of all those worthy christians.

who are fond of placing themselves in the judgment seat of such a tribunal, that *Jesus neither condemned, censured, nor judged any man for his errors.*

The severe denunciations, which he uttered against the Pharisees, were directed in no case against their opinions, but their *hypocrisy*, and *wicked conduct*. The heresies of the Sadducees, and the miserable superstitions of the Pharisees, drew from him no expressions of reproach, nor kindled a spirit of exclusion. He worshipped in their synagogues, and associated freely and cordially with all good men. He never even rebuked his disciples for their errors of opinion, although some of them were of no favourable tendency. If he told them of the weakness of their faith, as he occasionally did, it was with a gentleness consistent with his knowledge of their sincerity, and a proper sense of their imperfection. He did not try their feelings, nor abuse their integrity to themselves and their God, by dogmatical assertions, harsh epithets, and opprobrious names. He did not seek to alienate from them the affections of their brethren, nor to excite the suspicions of the indifferent, by proclaiming in the ears of the world their “dreadful, soul destroying errors;” nor by calling them enemies of the Gospel, who denied their Lord, and whom it was sinful to bid God speed; nor by charging them with embracing a system, which was “most acceptable to the worldly minded and licentious,” and by which they were “not in the smallest degree sanctified.” No language of this texture can be found in the discourses of our divine Mas-

ter. We are indebted for it to the spirit of his followers in later times.*

Another evil consequence of your view of charity, is the discouragement of religious inquiry. Nor is this of small magnitude. Till we think it indifferent whether we have truth or falsehood, inquiry in religion is a duty of the highest obligation. Truth yields only to inquiry, and there can be no progress in truth, while the freedom of investigation is restrained. But the man, who thinks it a deed of charity to deprecate the faith of another man, and to impress the stigma of immorality on his character as a necessary accompaniment of his faith, must have so unshaken a conviction of his own infallibility, as not to suffer himself to examine one step beyond his present acquisitions. Let all men have the same confidence, self estimation and charitable turn, and of course each one would think it a duty to adhere to his own faith, and deprecate the faith of all others. When charity to others requires us to judge their opinions, charity to ourselves would forbid any scrutiny into our own.

If any one can get up the cry of heresy against a particular tenet, all, who regard his authority, and value his reputation, and do not profess to be well informed on the subject, will take care to support him, repeat his cry, and reiterate his alarms. To inquire

* A large portion of the Sermon on the Mount is a comment on that kind of *charity*, which you call a "popular crudity." Jeremy Taylor's Eleventh Discourse in his Life of Christ is on *Charity*, as taught in this sermon. He considers it under three heads; **FORGIVING, GIVING, NOT JUDGING.**

afterwards would be to reproach themselves for their precipitancy and want of discernment. Hence, the man of charity not only shuts his own ears to all new counsel, and his understanding to all further wisdom, but throws the mantle of ignorance over as many as come within his reach.

On looking back to the view, which has been taken, it will be perceived, that so far from charity having nothing to do with *opinions*, it is really and properly confined to *these alone*. We ought not to be charitable to *wicked deeds*, and good ones do not need in their behalf the exercise of this virtue. Opinions are involuntary. It would be a crime for a man to pretend to believe contrary to his actual conviction; and whoever requires a particular faith, before he will let his charity appear, is in some degree accessory to such a crime.

It remains only to notice two or three texts of Scripture, which you have quoted to fortify your sentiments, and in justification of your charges. The first is that, which contains the denunciation of our Saviour against the Scribes and Pharisees. "Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?" Matth. xxiii. 33. In pronouncing this sentence, if the common notion of charity be correct, you observe, "our blessed Saviour most grievously offended against this duty." Had you attended to the whole chapter preceding, you could never have fallen into so great a mistake, as to quote this passage in your vindication. It has not the remotest bearing on the *opinions* of the Scribes and

Pharisees, but is pointedly aimed at their *conduct*. It was uttered immediately after enumerating their vices, and charging them with hypocrisy, with making long prayers for a pretence, deceiving the unwary, neglecting judgment, mercy, and faith, and being guilty of extortion, excess, iniquity. In this connexion, the text is in no respect to your purpose, and might be spoken by any person against others, whose conduct resembled that of the Pharisees, without encroaching on the charity, for which I have been contending.*

You next bring to your aid the following passage.
“ He that abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath

* The use made of the above quotation from the words of the Saviour, reminds one of the language of Archdeacon Philpot, who, in the reign of queen Mary, suffered martyrdom for his opinions. Among his companions in prison were certain Arians, whom he was accused of treating rudely and with abuse. He wrote in his defence what he called, *An Apology of John Philpot, written for spitting upon an Arian; with an invective against the Arians, the very natural children of Antichrist.*

After expressing his abhorrence of the opinions entertained by “an arrogant, ignorant and obstinately blinded Arian,” he goes on to ask ; “ Cannot you bear with me, if, after all this, I did spit on him ; partly as a declaration of that sorrow, which I had to hear such a proud blasphemer of our Saviour, and also to signify unto others there present, whom he went about to pervert, that he was a person to be abhorred of all christians, and not to be companied withal ? If this my fact seem to them, that judge not all things according to the Spirit of God, *uncharitable*, yet let them know, that God, who is charity, alloweth the same. For it is written in the Gospel, that *Christ came not to set us at peace with men in the earth, but at dirision* ; and that is for his cause and truth. And whosoever will not abide with Christ’s church in the truth, we ought not to show the points of charity unto any such, but to take him as a heathen and a publican.”

Here we find this worthy apologist, who suffered martyrdom for his own opinions, defending his harsh conduct towards those who differed from him, but who were equally persecuted, by quoting the example of the Saviour ; or rather by a forced and perverted interpretation of Scripture language. Whoever would bend the words or the example of Christ to sanction uncharitable-

not God ; he that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed. For he that biddeth him God speed, is partaker of his evil deeds.” 2 John, 9, 10, 11. Here, again, you have run into the same mistake as above. The Apostle is not reproving *errors*, but *vices*. The men of whom he is speaking, he tells us were “deceivers.” This shows them not to have been condemned for being led away by their erroneous opinions, but for attempting to impose on others, what they knew to be false. They taught false doctrines knowingly, and for selfish and wicked purposes. The Apostle considered them *transgressors*, as is manifest from a clause, which, for some reason, you omitted in your quotation. “ Whosoever *transgresseth*, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God.” It is moreover expressed in positive terms, that their “*evil deeds*” were the objects of this reprobation. To teach what they knew was false, with the intention of leading people into wicked practices, was neither a mistake of judgment, nor error of opinion, but

guess on account of honest difference of opinion, must do it by an interpretation equally forced and perverted. See Strype’s *Historical Memorials*, Vol. II. Appendix p. 145; as quoted in Lindsey’s *Historical View*, p. 96.

When the Sadducees, who denied the resurrection, attempted to embarrass our Saviour with a subtle question, he did not condemn them at once as heretics, and infidels, but mildly replied, “ Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures, nor the power of God,” and then went on in a gentle manner to point out and correct their mistake. Matth. xxii. 29.

a *deliberate crime*. To such persons no laws of charity afford a refuge.*

You have at least the encouragement of not being solitary in your application of this passage. It is often in the mouths of the orthodox of the present day. They have acquired a habit, or set up a fashion of calling every thing heresy, which deviates from the train of thought into which their minds have chanced to run, and to such persons as cannot force themselves into this track, however sincere and honest, however virtuous and heavenly minded, they seem to regard it the highest test of their piety, and zeal for the cause of God, to deny the christian civilities; and they make all smooth and quiet with their consciences by shielding themselves under the example of St. John, who cautioned the christians of his time, or rather the "elect lady, and her children," to whom he wrote his second epistle, not to associate with deceivers, transgressors, and evil doers. Such is the power of orthodoxy to blind the eyes, cloud the understanding, narrow the mind, shut up the heart, and freeze the affections. Else why is

* Whitby says of the phrase, *Bid him not God speed*, that "it seems to be taken from the Jews, who were forbid to say *God speed*, to a man that was excommunicated, or was *doing any evil action*." And in the present instance he adds, that it enjoins "a prohibition from doing any thing, which imports a consent to, or approbation of the *evil actions*" of one, to whom it may be applied. *Paraphrase on John 2, 11.* See, also, Whitby's *Discourses*, added to his *Last Thoughts*, second edition, p. 156.

Le Clerc remarks on the passage, that the persons alluded to were wicked men, who wished to be thought religious, but who rejected the authority of Christ and the apostles. No such, he continues, are found among christians of the present day, for they all revere the authority of the apostles, however they may depart from their doctrines. *Signantur mali homines, qui pii videri volebant, etc. Vid. Cleri. Adnotat. in Loc.*

this passage, and others like it, so often perverted to give countenance to the unchristian spirit, and unholy practices, which some, who profess to take their religion from the Bible, exhibit towards others, who are in no degree behind them in their earnest inquiries after truth, their humble and zealous efforts to obtain holiness of life, their confidence in the doctrines and promises of Christ, and their serious concern for their eternal welfare?

Your last quotation is from St. Paul's epistle to the Galatians. "If any man preach any other gospel unto you, than that ye have received, let him be accursed."* This text was directed against a particular class of persons, who, the apostle observes in the same connexion, "would *pervert* the Gospel of Christ." These persons, we learn from the whole epistle to the Galatians, were Judaizing christians, who were not simply betrayed into mistakes respecting the Christian faith, but desired to impose the laws of Moses on all the converts, and to keep up the distinctions, which had always existed between the Jews and Gentiles. They knew this was contrary to the truth and spirit of christianity, because an inspired Apostle had told them so, yet their pride and overbearing temper carried them forward in defiance of conscience and a better knowledge. In short, their *wicked propensities*, and *obstinate disbelief* of the plain, practical rules of the religion they professed, and *not the errors of their belief*, drew down upon them the severe censure in the text.

* Galatians i. 9.

The Apostle uses bold and confident language, and he gives a good reason. He was “taught by the revelation of Jesus Christ.” When Calvinists can prove the same in regard to themselves, it will become them to be equally confident, and I apprehend little hazard in predicting, that every Unitarian will then humbly submit to their authority.

Such are the proofs you bring from Scripture, that in the charges of heresy, and of immorality as the consequence of dangerous opinions, you were only acting “in conformity with the example, both of the Master, and his inspired servants.” What I have said is enough to show how far this example bears you out. I cannot close, however, without expressing my astonishment at the position assumed in resorting to this argument of defence. Is it possible, that any persons of the present day, really suppose themselves to have the same authority to judge and condemn the faith of others, as the Saviour and his Apostles? This must be taken for granted by all who can imagine that an appeal to their example would have any validity. This error runs through all your remarks. Positions are laid down in the most absolute manner. If you knew the hearts of men, like the Saviour, or were made acquainted with all divine truth, like the Apostle Paul, such a thing would appear less strange. No knowledge short of this could qualify any one to follow their example in the instances, which you propose; and even then no example could be found for judging the *errors* of men as *crimes*.

Unitarians consider charity an essential part of religion. They delight to think well of all men, who give the Scripture test of a holy and blameless life. Articles of belief may exhibit themselves in an infinite variety of forms. They may deceive and mislead. Treachery may be concealed under fair pretences, falsehood may be entwined with the most solemn protestations, and deeds of the blackest die may lurk in the folds of a capacious faith. Holiness is single, always the same, and always to be seen. Unitarians make this the criterion of a truly religious character. They are told, that "without holiness no man shall see the Lord," but they are not told, that they must suffer this penalty, unless they believe in a particular dogma, which they cannot understand, but which the fond partiality of some devotee may desire to impose on them.

While they pray to have their minds enlightened, and humbly submit to the guiding counsels of the Almighty, they feel secure in his kind protection, and do not fear, that he will make their humility and confidence the instruments of their ruin. They have charity for all christians, who show themselves sincere, and whose religion shines out in the brightness of a good life. Piety and virtue are with them the convincing test of a saving faith, and those articles of belief, which produce these in the highest degree, and to the greatest extent, will have the largest portion of their charity. Whoever thinks this an evidence of the defective faith, and the immorality of Unitarians, must be left to enjoy his opinion.

PART III.

TRINITY AND ATONEMENT.

LETTER I.

Various Opinions concerning the Trinity.

SIR,

As the doctrines of Trinity and Atonement are considered of so much importance by their advocates, and as Unitarians and Calvinists are supposed to differ more widely on these doctrines, than on most others, I shall no doubt be pardoned, if I beg your attention to a somewhat extended view of them. Not that I shall touch on the arguments by which they are believed to be supported, or advance any direct proofs of their falsehood. My inquiries will be turned to the meaning and nature of these doctrines, to their value as simple articles of faith, to their authority as supposed plain truths of Scripture, and especially to their influence as instruments of practical piety and goodness.

We are perpetually told, that the trinity and atonement are the essence of all true christianity, that without a firm faith in them no one has the least claims even to the name of christian, nor any well grounded hope of the mercy of God, and the rewards of salvation. To deny the trinity and atonement is represented to be the same thing as to deny the Saviour himself, to reject the Gospel, to renounce the authority of divine revelation, to cast off the laws of God, to be a heretic, infidel, deist, atheist, anything, in fact, but a good man, and a sincere inquirer after truth. If a denial of these doctrines be fraught with consequences so alarming, it must be an object of the very first magnitude to ascertain what the doctrines themselves are. It is impossible, that any articles of faith should have such power over the character and destiny of men, unless they are truths of the most obvious and positive kind, approving themselves instantly to the understanding, and written with beams of heavenly light on every page of the Gospel.

At all events, it would seem absolutely necessary, that they, who profess to have the true and saving faith, should agree in reporting and explaining what they believe. If any faith in a trinity be essential to salvation, must not this faith be the same in all? In the nature of things there can be only one true faith, and if there be not an agreement, how is it known that any person has this true faith? Or, in other words, how is it known, that any one has the faith by which he may hope to be saved? If a hundred persons have each a separate opinion, which they re-

spectively call the trinity, it is evident, that only one opinion out of the hundred can be true, and even this may be false. Are all these persons orthodox, and blessed with a saving faith, because they embrace a set of notions, in many respects contradictory, to which they give the name of trinity? If not, who out of the hundred is truly orthodox; who has the fundamental doctrine; who is in the way of salvation?

A proper method of testing the accuracy of the assumption, which has been made with so much confidence, respecting the value of the doctrines named trinity and atonement, as articles of faith, is to ascertain the fact, whether the persons themselves, who have been most zealous in believing and defending them, have harmonized in their belief. If it shall appear, that the same thing, which one calls a trinity, or atonement, is the trinity, or atonement of all the rest, I allow, that it will make an argument strongly in favour of the assumption. But if, on the contrary, it shall turn out, that there are no uniform and fixed principles by which the professed believers of these doctrines are guided, that they break into parties and form systems radically different from each other, and that no two persons will agree in defining their own conceptions, it will follow, that no such importance as has been pretended can be attached to a faith in certain dogmas, to which any one may at pleasure give the names of trinity and atonement. Whether the dogmas themselves are true or false, the consequence will be the same, and will prove,

that the importance with which some persons would clothe a *mere faith* in them is imaginary.

Let us proceed to this inquiry, and, in the present letter, employ ourselves with the question, *What is the trinity?* What are the conceptions, or ideas either separately or combined, which form the object of faith, to which this appellation has been given? For the sake of form, this question may be asked, but no one, who has attended to the subject, will flatter himself that it can be answered. To bring together a small number of the leading opinions of those professing themselves Trinitarians, is all that will be attempted. It would be no difficult matter, perhaps, to determine in some general sense how the trinity is set forth in particular creeds, and the notions of individuals; but to find out any thing like a system in which all Trinitarians would unite, or to enumerate the parties into which the advocates of this doctrine have been divided, from its origin to the present day, and the opposing schemes invented to bring it within the compass of the human faculties, would be as impossible in itself, as fruitless in the attempt.

Trinitarians themselves have not yet approached so near to a similarity of views, as to agree in a definition, notwithstanding many of them profess to regard faith in this undefinable doctrine as absolutely essential to salvation. One of the heaviest censures affected to be passed by the orthodox on Unitarians, is, that they do not agree in explaining their own opinions. Before this point is insisted on any further,

we should be glad if Trinitarians would unite in some common explanation of the doctrine, which they profess to think the most important in religion; or, at least, show some good reason why we are to reverence as a fundamental article of faith, a doctrine, which cannot be defined in Scripture language, and which is confessed to be unintelligible and inexplicable. The truth is, that no plan has been devised, which was not encumbered with so many insurmountable difficulties, that few minds could be induced to receive it in that shape. Hence, plans have been multiplied, the powers of invention and combination have been put in requisition, till the theories of the trinity have become as numerous as the writers by whom it has been attempted to be explained.

Bishop Stillingfleet speaks of five different trinities, radically distinct from each other, which the opposers of that doctrine had detected in the writings of its defenders. *First*, the Ciceronian trinity, which represents the three persons, as three relations of God to his creatures; *secondly*, the Cartesian trinity, in which the three persons are three infinite minds; *thirdly*, the Platonic trinity, which consists of three coeternal beings, two of which are subordinate to the other; *fourthly*, the Aristotelian trinity, in which the three persons are one numerical substance; *fifthly*, the mystical trinity, which no conscientious believer should presume to explain.* Another writer has discovered forty particulars in which Trinitarians

* Stillingfleet's Vindication of the Trinity, Pref. p. 5.

are at variance among themselves in their sense of this doctrine.* Had he chosen to take the trouble, he might have found forty more.

Some of the wiser sort of divines have been more cautious how they committed themselves. They have taken care to talk in such a way, as either to mean nothing at all, or any thing, which should suit the taste and fancy of their readers. Instead of defining, or explaining, they tell us of three *differences*, or *diversities*, or *subsistences*, or *properties*, or *somewhats*; of three *internal relations*, or *external relations*, or *modes of existence*; of any thing, indeed, but plain rational facts from which you can gain a single idea, or form a single conception.

As an example, suffer me to quote a paragraph from Cheynel's Book of the Divine Trinity.

"We may best resemble all that difference," says Cheynel, "which is between the essence of God, and the divine subsistences, by considering the transcendent affections of *ens simpliciter*, and the attributes of God; who doth infinitely transcend, not only a predicamental substance, but a metaphysical entity; as the most metaphysical men, who are sound in the faith, do honestly confess. Concerning the transcendental affections of *ens*, which are *unum verum bonum*, we say, these three affections, and *ens in latitudine*, do not make four things really distinct; and yet we say, they are real and positive affections."†

* Ben Mordecai's Apology, Vol. I., p. 84, 213.

† Notes and Illustrations to Ben Mordecai's First Letter, p. 154.

“St. Austin being asked what the *three* are, says; human learning is scanty.

This, in the language of the learned Henry Taylor, is called explaining ; and it is just as clear as the explanations, with which other divines have darkened this subject, although they may have been less skilful than Cheynel in using the dialectical weapons of the schoolmen. Witness an elaborate volume recently published by a professor of oriental languages in the College of Aberdeen, in which the acute professor attempts to prove the doctrine of the trinity by “Reason and Demonstration founded on Duration and Space.” Witness Sherlock’s Vindication, by the reading of which Emlyn and Manning were driven to be Unitarians. They were tempted to suspect, that a doctrine which the ability of such a man succeeded so imperfectly in explaining, and so poorly in vindicating, must have something defective in itself. Witness the writings of Barrow, South, and Waterland, and behold men of great genius and learning uttering themselves on the trinity in phrases of such unmeaning import, as they never would have ventured on any other subject of the most trivial kind. Look where you will, and it will invariably be found, that the more the defenders of this doctrine say about it, the less intelligible they become, and the farther they recede from the principles of common sense.

The following is a classification of the opinions, which have been entertained concerning the trinity by some of the most eminent English divines.

and affords not terms to express it ; ‘tis therefore answered, *three persons*, not as if that was to the purpose ; but somewhat must be said, and we must not be silent.” *Ibid.* 155. *Aust. de Trin.* LV. c. 9.

“First, the Athanasians, among whom were Dr. Waterland, and probably Archbishop Secker, from the encomium he passes on the Athanasian Creed, maintained, that the trinity consists of three distinct, independent, and equal persons, constituting one and the same God; or in other words, that the ‘Father is Almighty, the Son is Almighty, the Holy Ghost is Almighty; and yet there are not three AlUIThies, but one Almighty.”* *Secondly,* according to Mr. Howe’s theory, there are three, distinct, intelligent hypostases, each having a distinct, intelligent nature, united in some inexplicable manner, so as to make one God, in somewhat the same way as the corporeal, sensitive, and intellectual faculties are united to form one man. *Thirdly,* Dr. Wallis was an advocate for the Sabellian hypothesis; and held that the three persons in the trinity were only three *modes*, or *relations*, which the Deity bears to his creatures. This also was probably the opinion of Archbishop Tillotson.† *Fourthly,* Bishop Pearson supposed the Father to be an underived essence, and the Son to have received

* Secker’s Works, Vol. VI. p. 126.

Jeremy Taylor, in his notions of a trinity, probably approached as near to an Athanasian as any thing. He says, however, of the three persons, that “they are *three* and *one* after a *secret manner*, which we must believe, but cannot understand.” *Golden Grove*, p. 2.

† Tillotson calls the Father “the fountain of deity,” and speaks of the Son as “an emanation from him.” He tells us, that “there are three *differences* in the deity, which the Scripture speaks of by the names of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.” He informs us also that he has no objection to the word person to denote these differences, though he adds, “I remember that St. Jerom does somewhere desire to be excused from it.” *Tillotson’s Works*, Vol. iii. p. 233. 278.

everything by communication from God the Father. ‘Here can be but one person,’ says he, ‘originally of himself subsisting in that infinite Being, because a plurality of more persons so subsisting would necessarily infer a plurality of Gods.’ The Son possessed the whole divine nature by *communication*, and not by *participation*, and in such a way, that he was as really God, as the Father. Bishop Bull and Dr. Owen adopted a similar theory.* *Fifthly*, in the system of Dr. Thomas Burnet, the Father is a self-existent being, the Son and Spirit are *dependent*; but so united, that divine perfections and worship may be ascribed to each. *Sixthly*, Mr. Baxter defines the three divine persons to be *wisdom power*, and *love*; and illustrates his meaning by the *vital power*, *intellect*, and *will*, in the soul of man, and by *motion*, *light*, and *heat*, in the sun. For this explanation he was indebted to the sharpened wits of the schoolmen.

“*Seventhly*, Bishop Burgess supposes the three *persons* to make one God, but does not allow, that these persons are three *beings*. He makes out his position by the following syllogism. ‘The Scriptures declare that there is only one God; the same Scriptures declare that there are three omnipresent *persons*; but there cannot be two omnipresent *beings*.’ According to this hypothesis the trinity is made up of three

* Bishop Pearson’s Exposition of the Creed, Oxford, 1792, Vol. I, p. 157, 217.

Speaking of the Son, Dr. Owen says, that “He is the essential image of the Father, because all the properties of the divine nature are *communicated* unto him, together with personality, from the Father.” *Declaration of the Glorious Mystery of the Person of Christ*, p. 100.

nonentities called persons.* *Eighthly*, Bishop Gastrell says, ‘The three names of God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, must denote a threefold difference, or distinction, belonging to God, but such as is consistent with the unity and simplicity of the divine nature; for each of these includes the *whole idea* of God, and *something more*. So far as they express the nature of God, they all adequately and exactly signify the same. It is the additional signification, which makes all the distinction between them.’ According to Bishop Gastrell, then, each person of the trinity includes the whole idea of God, and something more, but when all taken together, they make the idea of one God, and no more.† *Ninthly*, a scheme, which certainly vies with any other for novelty, is that lately advanced by Mr. Heber, in his Bampton Lectures. He has made the discovery, that the second and third persons in the trinity are no other than the angels Michael and Gabriel. It was the second person, who conversed with Moses on Mount Sinai; and the third person, who constituted the Jewish Schekinah. To clear up this point, the erudite lecturer levies most heavily on the Jewish Rabbies, the Targums, the Mahometan Doctors, and the ancient Fathers.‡ *Lastly*, I will mention only one

* Bishop Burgess’ Brief Memorial, p. 21.—Belsham’s Reply to Moysey, p. 126.

† Moysey’s Bampton Lectures, p. 58.—Also, Reply to Moysey, p. 31.

‡ Heber’s Bampton Lectures, preached before the University of Oxford, 1815, p. 211. 228. Appendix to Lecture IV, p. 240—250.

scheme more, which is that of Dr. Sherlock, as contained in his Vindication of the Doctrine of the Trinity. He says, ‘The Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, are as really distinct persons, as Peter, James, and John; each of which is God. We must allow each person to be *a* God. These three infinite minds are distinguished, just as three created minds are, by self consciousness; and by mutual consciousness, each person of these has the *whole* wisdom, power, and goodness of the other two.’ This scheme differs little from the Athanasian, except in being more clear and definite.”*

Such are some of the modes in which the trinity has been represented by those, who have been most zealous to defend the doctrine. And even here we have only the outlines, the elements, of general systems, which have been divided and subdivided into innumerable new and peculiar forms, bearing little

* See Letters on the Ministry, Ritual, and Doctrines of the Protestant Episcopal Church, p. 149.

On another occasion Dr. Sherlock says, that Christ “was perfect God, and perfect man in one person.” *Scripture Proofs of our Saviour’s Divinity.* p. 262.

Dr. Horsely gives a most singular account of the origin of the second person in the trinity. He says it was “a principle, which was common to all the Platonic Fathers and *seems to be founded in Scripture*, that the existence of the Son flows necessarily from the divine intellect exerted on itself; *from the Father’s contemplation of his own perfections.*” Tracts in Controversy with Priestley, p. 55. Whether he puts the greater confidence in the Platonic Fathers, or the Scriptures, must be left for those to decide, who can detect any meaning in this dark paragraph. He quotes Melancthon, but sheds no light on this darkness. See *Disq. IV.*

For a more full account of some of the above statements, see Doddridge’s Lectures, Part VII, Prop. 132.—Lindsey’s Apology, p. 63.—Adams’s Dictionary, 4th ed. p. 291.—Reply to Moysey, p. 28—32, 123—130.

resemblance to their originals. Which of these trinities is the one, that shall make a man a true christian? Which is sealed with the stamp of orthodoxy; and which is to be relied on as an article of saving faith?

Although no definite notions of any single doctrine, which Trinitarians would unite in calling the trinity, can be collected from this chaos of incertitude and variety, yet a few landmarks may be discerned, which would seem to have served as common guides; and the numerous schemes, to which the prolific invention of theologians has given birth, may all be arranged perhaps, without much violence, under two general ones, the *Modal*, and the *Tripersonal*. The former teaches a trinity of relations in the Deity, and the latter a trinity of beings. The modalists have succeeded in establishing a trinity in name, and destroying it in reality, for there is no more reason why we should suppose three relations in the Deity, than three hundred. It would be impious, indeed, to limit these to any certain number. When a mode signifies any thing more than a relation, it is concerned with the nature, or being, or essence of God, and then it belongs to some example under the general division of tripersonal trinity. As neither the unity, nor attributes of God, are affected by this modal system, it differs in no essential respect from Unitarianism. It is the same thing under a different name, and its bearing is nearly the same on the object of worship, on morals, and the means of piety.

The last general scheme referred to by Stillingfleet, or what has rather been made an apology for a scheme, has become very popular of late. It is that, which shrouds the trinity in a *mystery*. This is a last resort, and comes in most opportunely when every attempt at explanation fails. It rejects the aid of reason, as fallacious and deceptive, and throws an impenetrable veil of obscurity over revelation. It is, nevertheless, founded on a principle, which is of universal application. Whenever you are perplexed in any argument, or caught between the griping horns of a dilemma, you have only to cry out, a *mystery*, and your victory is accomplished ; you are encased in an armour of adamant, and may exult with great composure over the weakness of your antagonist, who can wield no other weapons, than such as are supplied by common sense, reason, and plain truth.

No one, it is presumed, ever put on this armour, till he found these weapons inadequate to his purpose. A mystical revelation is a contradiction in terms ; and a mystical trinity, whatever else it may mean, can never mean a revealed trinity. Just in proportion as you detect mysteries in the Gospel, or doctrines, which were professedly taught as revealed truths of the greatest importance, but not intended to be understood, just so far you will find reasons to distrust the divine authority of the religion of the Saviour, and to disrespect its author. This notion concerning the trinity may be laid out of the question, as it would be an idle waste of time and words to talk about a thing of which we do not pretend to

have any distinct conceptions. If there be any thing in this mystery, or in any other mystery, especially conducive to morals, this must be left to the wisdom of the initiated to develope.

My future remarks will be chiefly directed to the grand division of the trinity above denominated the *Tripersonal*; and that I may not be perplexed with the endless differences of opinion existing among those, who are ranged in this division, I will confine myself to that more simple form of the doctrine contained in the Confession of Faith. "In the unity of the Godhead, there be three persons of one substance, power, and eternity; God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost."* As a general definition, this would seem sufficiently clear. Every person, who assents to it, has views peculiar to himself respecting the nature and relations of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, yet all suppose them to be three distinct persons, and that each person is God. To this notion of the doctrine my future investigations will be limited. It does not come within my present object to inquire how it could be brought to pass, that three persons, each of whom is God, could make one being and one God; or how there could be three persons, or beings, each of whom is God, and not be three Gods. I am engaged with the nature, the origin, and tendency of this doctrine, and not with its truth, or consistency.†

* Confession of Faith, Chap. II, Sec. 3.

† Dr. South seriously discourses on the subject as follows. "That any one should be both father and son to the same person, produce himself, be

In regard to its nature, or to the thing itself, which is called trinity by those, who profess to believe a doctrine under this name, enough has been said. Before I proceed to examine the Scripture authority, and the tendency of the kind of trinity last mentioned, I will devote a few words to some of your views on this subject.

In explaining what you understand by the term Unitarian, you express yourself in the following manner. "When the orthodox use this title, they consider it as only designating those, who reject all belief in that *mysterious threefold mode of existence* in the one Supreme and Eternal Jehovah, which the Scriptures, as we think, *plainly teach*; which lies at the foundation of the whole plan of redemption; and of which the rejection *always has been*, and *always must be*, connected with *a denial of every essential principle of the Gospel*." This passage is of so remarkable a character, that it will admit of a short analysis.

We are here told of a "mysterious threefold mode of existence" in the Deity. What are we to understand by this phrase? I do not ask *how* the Deity exists in three modes, nor how he exists in any manner, nor what a mode is; I simply ask what is the meaning of the words here put together. To my mind they convey no ideas whatever; they are

cause and effect too, and so the copy give being to its original, seems at first sight so very strange and unaccountable, that were it not to be adored as a *mystery*, it would be exploded as a *contradiction*." South's Sermons, Vol. III. p. 140, Lond. 1718.

mere sounds, which fall on the ear, and are lost. Before we can have a true faith, is it necessary to talk of the Supreme Being without ideas, and to describe his nature in combinations of words to which we can affix no meaning?

Again, it is said, that this *mysterious* nature of God is *plainly* taught in the Scriptures. How then should it be so mysterious? In most cases, it would be natural to expect, that things, which are plainly taught, must be clearly understood; and not only so, but that the language used to express them should be so constructed as to communicate definite ideas.

Moreover, you go on to say, that a “rejection of this mysterious threefold mode of existence always has been, and always must be, connected with a denial of every essential principle of the Gospel.” That is, to reject a proposition, which, in the very terms of it, is confessed to be *mysterious*, of which no mortal can form a distinct conception, and to which no intelligible meaning can be affixed; to reject this proposition, which it is impossible for a rational man not to reject, is to be accounted a “denial of every essential principle of the Gospel.” Nay, this “always has been, and always must be” the dreadful consequence. A hard necessity, truly, for conscientious christians, who think it their duty to obey the Saviour and Apostles in preference of all others, and who cannot profess a belief in a thing of which they have no conceptions. But, after all, perhaps they may be permitted to look into the Bible, and have some respect for the revealed word of God; per-

haps they may have the liberty of searching for the place in which our Saviour has authorized any one of his followers to proclaim to all the rest what “always has been and always must be,” in respect to their faith, and their understanding of the Scriptures. Perhaps they may be tolerated in thinking a reality better than a mode, and a truth better than a speculation.

How does it appear, that a rejection of this *mysterious threefold mode of existence* is connected with a *denial of every essential principle of the Gospel?* Are not the doctrines of the divine attributes, a superintending providence, the moral agency of man, the Messiahship of Jesus, repentance, pardon of the penitent, a resurrection, future state of retribution, and salvation by the free grace of God; are not love to our Maker and to our brethren, faith and charity, piety and benevolence; are not these *essential principles* of the Gospel? And what have they to do with a metaphysical notion about a mysterious mode of existence? Must we be censured as skeptics in these most important principles, or as denying them altogether, unless we can detect some faint glimmering of light in the chaotic darkness of this proposition?

But before we are required to believe in this doctrine of modes, we have not only a right to demand what is meant by the form of speech in which it is expressed, but also what is meant by a mode itself. When you talk of a *mode of existence* in God, do you mean that he is a divided, changeable being; that

he exists in different forms at different times and places; that he has certain capacities of will and action to day, and opposite ones to morrow? If this be your meaning, it is intelligible enough. But if you add to this, that God is one and indivisible, simple in his nature and unchangeable in his being, we are again involved in obscurity, and compelled to acknowledge, that to your notions we can attach no ideas. We see only contradiction and absurdity. A trinity of this kind of modes either destroys the unity of God, or destroys itself. When it is reduced to such a form as to be understood, it denotes three beings, or distinct intelligences in God; when it cannot be understood, it is either a contradiction, or means nothing at all.

Suppose it be replied, that this is forcing the matter too far, and that a mode of existence, or being, or nature, was not literally intended, but only a mode of action. If we take the subject on this ground, we shall, it is true, be brought back to something intelligible. God has certainly many modes of exercising his perfections. In this respect, each of his attributes may be called a mode. He displays himself in various modes to all the works of his hands; he is the Father and protector of his rational creatures, whom he loves, sustains, and blesses. He has revealed himself through Jesus Christ, in whom were his wisdom and power; he communicated his holy spirit to the Apostles, enlightened them with heavenly truth, and made them successful preachers of a pure and persecuted religion. He is still regardful of the in-

terests of his church, and all things are continually under the guidance of his providence. These are some of the modes by which God is known to the universe. All the perfections of his nature are modes, which never cease nor change. But these in no way affect the essence of his being, nor the manner of his existence.

If such be the modes to which you allude, it does not appear why you call them threefold. There is no limit to their number, nor any thing about them mysterious. How the wisdom, or power, or any other attribute of God, operates, is not to be understood; but the fact, that it does operate, is as plain as any fact resting on moral evidence. And if the trinity be any thing, it must be a subject of fact. I do not ask how your trinity of modes exists, but what this trinity is? What is the image in your mind, which represents a mode, and what are the three modes, which make the trinity? There can be no mystery in this. You are desired to explain no further, than you must necessarily understand. A mode is either something or nothing, as it concerns the nature of God, and it is only required to know which is meant when applied to the trinity. If it is any thing in reality, it must interfere with the divine unity; if it is no more than a relation, it has no bearing on the subject, and the word ought not to be employed any longer to confuse and embarrass the understanding in its honest endeavours after truth.

All the speculations, in short, concerning modes in the trinity, have been no other than forced attempts

to bend an imaginary faith to a name. Persons, who have thus exercised themselves, have found it impossible to resist the evidence of the simple unity, but have thought it necessary at all hazards to hold fast to the name of trinity. As realities could not be found, they have resorted to modes, and when the substance was wholly gone, they have been contented with shadows. Some have discovered, that a shadow is nothing, and all at once surprized themselves in the fearful ranks of Unitarians. No remedy was left but mystery; and when to the nothingness of a mode is added the darkness of mystery, that must be a barren imagination indeed, which cannot with a tranquil conscience adapt its faith to any measure, and accomodate it to any name.

Having thus spoken of the nature of trinity, and of the infinite variety of opinions, which come under that name, we may now go on to consider the grounds on which it is supposed to be *plainly taught* in the Scriptures. My remarks in the next letter will be chiefly applicable to the doctrine in its broadest sense, but particularly adapted to that branch of it quoted above from the Calvinistic formulary of faith.

LETTER II.

Doctrine of a Trinity not taught in the Scriptures.

SIR,

AT the present day, it is common for Trinitarians to discourse of the plainness with which their doctrine is expressed in the Scriptures. They find it in almost every chapter of the Old Testament and the New, and wonder that any one can be so dull, or so perverse, as not to see and confess a truth, which to them shines so brightly.

Many reasons occur, however, which induce those, who have not been so fortunate as to make this discovery in any part of the Bible, to think that the believers in a trinity labour under some deception in this respect, either from their predilections, their zeal for a favourite opinion, or from a combination of causes not difficult to be enumerated. If the doctrine be so plainly taught, it is very natural to ask, how it comes to pass, that thousands and tens of thousands do not find it, who yet inquire with the same advantages, the same motives and vigilance, with a resolution equally determined, and a zeal equally ardent, as those who boast of a better success ?

The details of my last letter throw obstacles not to be surmounted in the way of the notion, that the

Scriptures plainly teach a trinity. The friends of the doctrine themselves are full of differences and contradictions; they agree in nothing; they have no common principles; and when they attempt to explain, they are obscure, and at variance with each other. Their trinities are infinite in number and variety. What stronger proof can be given, that no doctrine which has received the name of trinity, is an obvious doctrine of the Bible? If it were said to be hidden, and found only by patient and deep research, the problem would be much less difficult to solve. It would, indeed, afford something like a plausible reason, why persons have come to such dissimilar results in looking for it. But to tell us a thing is *plain*, which many cannot see at all, and of which those, who do see it, have no consistent or definite conceptions, if this be not a contradiction in terms, it is a glaring misuse of language.

The opinion, that the trinity is plainly taught in the Scriptures, has not generally prevailed till of late. So far were Trinitarians from holding such an opinion in former times, that in nothing did they exercise their ingenuity more, than in devising reasons why this doctrine should be only obscurely shadowed forth by the Saviour and the Apostles, and why it should be kept wholly concealed from the Jews. This subject merits discussion, not because it affects the Scriptural evidence in regard to the truth or falsehood of the doctrine; but because it is intimately connected with the presumption of making the trinity a necessary article of faith, which all persons

must believe before they can be called christians, or hope for salvation. If the primitive christians knew nothing of this doctrine, it is absurd to clothe it with so much importance; nay, it is actually putting a false character on the religion of Jesus, and deceiving the humble inquirer into a fatal reliance on things, which can have no good tendency on his religious or moral conduct. In this light the subject is worth pursuing.

Let us go back to the time of our Saviour, and inquire of the people, who listened to his preaching; let us accompany the Apostles in their travels, and ascertain the opinions, which were derived from their instructions; let us refer to the first believers in christianity, to the early and later Fathers, to the Catholics after the Reformation, to some of the first reformers, to the Arminians of Holland, and even to eminent English divines. The train of testimony, which might be brought from these sources, would show with how little discretion the trinity is now affirmed to be plainly taught in the Scriptures, and with how little regard to consistency it is imposed as a necessary article of faith.

In the first place, then, it will not be denied, that the great design of the revelations contained in the Old Testament was to acquaint the Jews with the true nature of God; nor will it be denied, that from all these revelations they had no conceptions of any other mode of existence, than that of his simple unity. It was perpetually enforced on them as a fundamental truth, that the “Lord their God was

one” No history, either sacred or profane, acquaints us with a single fact, from which it can be inferred, that the Jews had any knowledge of a three-fold nature in the Deity. On the contrary, all history is against such an inference ; and the demonstrable certainty, that these people, for whose light and improvement the Old Testament was expressly designed, never had the remotest suspicion of such a doctrine being contained in their sacred books, is the clearest possible evidence, that it is not plainly taught there, whatever may now be deduced from types, and shadows, and dark sayings, and Hebrew idioms, and double meanings.

And, again, where does it appear, that the people to whom our Saviour preached, understood him to describe God as existing in a threefold nature ; Or, to put the question in a more direct shape, where does it appear, that in one instance, he spoke of him as any other, than the one true God ? The only history we have of the opinions of that period is contained in the Gospels ; and there we are made to know, as distinctly as we can be made know, that Christ ascribes all things to one Being, whom he calls the Father and the Creator. To whom did he offer prayers, render homage, and acknowledge submission ? Was it not invariably to one God, the Father ? Did he ever address the Holy Spirit, as a separate being called “God the Holy Ghost,” or another, called “God the Son ?” Never. His miracles, his divine intelligence, all his superiour powers, he refers to one Being, the Father, not once only, but

always. He never declares himself the true God, nor equal to the true God; and his example and character from beginning to end are as opposite as any thing can be to such an opinion.

The sentiments of the people, as far as we can learn, were in exact accordance with these traits of his conduct and instructions. Were their actions, or their conversation, or their behaviour towards him such, as would be expected, if they believed the Supreme Jehovah to be with them in bodily presence? This question applies equally in regard to his disciples and his enemies. When he healed a sick man by a miracle, "the multitude marvelled, and glorified God, who had given so much power unto men." They did not marvel, that God had come down on the earth, but that he had clothed with such power a man in all appearances like themselves. Mary said to him, after the death of Lazarus, "If thou hadst been here, my brother had not died." When she spoke these words, could she believe him to be the infinite God, who is every where equally present with his love and his power? Many examples of this sort might be added, were it necessary; but no one, it is presumed, will undertake to prove it to have been a prevailing opinion among the contemporaries of our Saviour, that he was God, or that in the nature of God were three distinct persons. The testimony and probability are against such a result; and it would be no better than presumptuous, idle conjecture, to represent the trinity as plainly taught,

if taught at all, in our Saviour's immediate instructions.

When we come to the preaching of the Apostles, we hear nothing of their promulgating a trinity. We have a minute account of their preaching written by St. Luke in the Acts of the Apostles; and we here look in vain for any place in which they teach the deity of Christ, or the existence of a trinity. Nor can it be inferred from any thing said or done by their hearers, that they understood them to publish such doctrines. The Messiahship of Jesus, a future retribution, and the necessity of repentance, were the doctrines on which they chiefly dwelt. St. Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost, and Paul's discourse to the Athenians, represent Christ as sustaining a character not only distinct from God, but in all respects subordinate to him, acting by his commands, and moved by his influence.

In short, it cannot be proved, that the persons instructed by the prophets, the Saviour, and the Apostles, had any notions of a trinity; while on the contrary, almost every page of the Bible is loud in proclaiming the divine unity, and in establishing the fact, that this was the faith of all true believers. Inference, in this case, cannot be admitted as argument. If the trinity be any thing, it is as essential to the divine nature as the unity, and if one was as plainly taught as the other, we should have the same evidence of their having been equally believed. We have no such evidence, but abundance to the contrary, and this is enough to justify us in affirming, that the trinity was

not preached by the Saviour and his Apostles in such a manner as to be understood at the time.

Let us see, in the next place, how this result agrees with the sentiments of some of the early Fathers. We shall here find almost a universal opinion, that the deity of Christ was *not* plainly taught in the Scriptures; and as for a trinity of persons, nothing is heard of it, till the deity of the Holy Spirit was decreed by the council of Constantinople, near the close of the fourth century. A few passages from the Fathers shall here be introduced, merely to substantiate the *fact*, that in their opinion the trinity was not explicitly taught, either in the Old Testament or the New.

Athanasius allows, that Christ did not make known his deity to the Jews, and endeavours to account for it, by intimating, that the world could not yet bear such a doctrine. And he adds, “I venture to affirm, that even the blessed disciples themselves had not a clear knowledge of his deity, *οὐδὲ πέρι της αὐτοῦ διοτύπου εἶχον φρονεῖν*, till the Holy Spirit came on them at the day of Pentecost.”* This passage has a comprehensive import, and proves most clearly, that in the opinion of Athanasius, the deity of Christ was not known even to the Apostles till after his death. Theodoret speaks to the same purpose. “Before his death and sufferings, the Lord Christ, *οὐδεπότεν χριστός*, did not appear as God, either to the Jews generally, or to his Apostles.”† Chrysostom often intimates, that

* Serm. Major de Fid. Montf. Coll. Vol. II, p. 39.

† Opera Vol. III, p. 15. Ed. Hal.

Christ made but an imperfect indication of his deity to his disciples. On one occasion he observes, Christ “did not immediately reveal his deity; at first he was thought to be a prophet, Christ, simply a man, *πλησιν ανθρωπος*; but at last from his works and sayings it appeared what he was.”* Chrysostom further says, that Mary, the mother of Jesus, did not herself know the secret of his being the Supreme God.†

The Fathers, also, acknowledged, that after the death of Christ, the Apostles did not teach this doctrine openly; as we learn from the hypothesis framed by them to account for the fact. They profess to consider it a mark of prudence and caution in the Apostles to avoid promulgating so unpopular a tenet. It would shock the prejudices of the Jews, on the one hand, who thought the unity of God a vital doctrine; and on the other hand, it would encourage the heathens in their polytheism and idolatry; and thus serious obstacles would be thrown in the way of converting either Jews or Gentiles to Christianity. It was deemed wise, therefore, to conceal for a time a doctrine of such dangerous tendency.

Let the Fathers speak on this point. Chrysostom acquaints us, that our Saviour confined himself to instructions concerning his human powers, by reason of the “weakness of his hearers, and the inability of those who saw and heard him for the first time, to receive more sublime discourses.”‡ He makes

* *Opera*, Vol. VIII, p. 20.

† *Ibid.* Vol. III, p. 289.

‡ *Ibid.* Vol. I, p. 409.

the same remark in commenting on the introductory words of the Epistle to the Hebrews.* Οecumenius says, in remarking on the text, *There is one God the Father, and one Lord Jesus Christ*, that “The Apostle speaks cautiously of the Father and the Son, calling the Father one God, lest they should think there were two Gods, and the Son one Lord, lest they should think there were two Lords.”† In commenting on another text we have the following remark of Theophylact; “Because polytheism then prevailed, the Apostle did not speak plainly of the deity of Christ, lest he should be thought to introduce many Gods.”‡ Again, “As others had *made no mention* of the existence of the Logos before the ages, John taught this doctrine, lest the Logos of God should be thought to be, *ψιλος ανθρωπος*, a mere man.”§

From these sentiments of the Fathers, it may justly be inferred, that, in their opinion, no such doctrine as the trinity, nor even the deity of Christ, is plainly set forth in the Scriptures. They all agree that our Saviour did not thus teach, and Athanasius represents the Apostles as ignorant of his deity, till the day of Pentecost, which was some time after his death. And when instructed in this sublime truth,

* Επειδην αυτοις αυτων ποτε αι φυχαι, και υπερανθρωπινην μνηστο τα πιστα τη χριστου φησιν ο Θεος δι αυτων ελαλησεν. Opera Vol. X, p. 1756, in Heb. Cap. 1.

† Opera, Vol. I, p. 492. Ed. Lutet. 1631.

‡ Comment. in 1 Tim. ii. 5.

§ Comment. in Matt. Praef. p. 1, 2. The original of all the above passages, as well as many others of the same kind, may be seen in Priestley’s *History of Early Opinions*, Vol. iii. Book 3.

they are described as studiously avoiding to divulge it, lest offence might be given to weak minds, and to the unconverted. We must remember, that these were the opinions of men, who for the most part believed in the divinity of Christ in some sense, and were solicitous to find a reason why the Scriptures were so silent on the subject. The circumstance of their forming a hypothesis makes it evident, that they did not see the trinity in the writings of the Apostles. Theophylact, it is true, and some others, believed John to have been more bold, and to have spoken more to the point in regard to this doctrine; but this is no other than saying, that it is not taught anywhere else, for John was the last of the sacred writers.

Dr. Horsley thought to weaken the force of the above conclusion, by supposing, that it was the *unbelieving Jews* only, towards whom the caution, or as he prefers to call it, the “ sagacity,” of the Apostles was exercised. To persons of this description the plainer parts of the christian faith were preached, and when they had become partially initiated, the deeper mysteries of the trinity were brought to their knowledge. A conjecture so forced hardly deserved the notice, which Dr. Priestley condescended to give it.* Where do we hear of the Apostles preaching in private? They preached openly to Jews and Gentiles, converted and unconverted. Were not their writings intended for the instruction

* Letters to Dr. Horsley, p. 45. London, 1815.

and benefit of the whole christian world ? And is it to be admitted, that the most essential parts of the true faith were left out to accommodate the unbelieving Jews of that day ?*

From the Fathers we may descend to later writers in the Catholic Church, who were ardent defenders of a trinity, but have not considered it a Scripture doctrine. On this subject Chillingworth says to a Catholic, “ As for Scripture, your men deny very plainly and frequently, that this doctrine can be proved by it.”† But the dogma of the trinity

* In resorting to this device, Dr. Horsley concedes the main point after all, which is, that Athanasius could not find the trinity in the writing of the Apostles. “ In their public sermons,” says Dr. Horsley, “ addressed to the unbelieving multitude, they were content to maintain that Jesus, whom the Jews had crucified, was risen from the dead; *without touching his divinity otherwise than in remote allusions*; but to suppose, that they carried their converts no greater length, is to suppose that their private instruction was not more particular, than their public.” *Letters in Reply to Dr. Priestley*, p. 200, American Ed. 1821. The only difference between Priestley and Horsley seems to be, that Priestley thought the Apostles did not teach at all any important doctrines not contained in their writings; and Horsley *conjectured* that these were taught secretly.

Jamieson labours this point with his usual prolixity. By quoting largely from Athanasius, he succeeds in proving, that he was accustomed to contradict himself, and from this circumstance seems half inclined to doubt the import of the passage, which made Priestley and Horsley believe, that Athanasius did not think the trinity openly taught by the Apostles. As for the innumerable specimens of corroborative testimony collected by Dr. Priestley from other Fathers, Jamieson says, “ It would serve no good purpose to follow him through this labyrinth.” *Vindication*, Vol. I, p. 293. This was a summary mode of laying out of the account some of the strongest parts of the work, which he was engaged to answer. He actually admits, as Horsley had done, the main point at issue, and proceeds to commend the judgment and prudence of the Apostles in keeping the trinity a secret. He takes up the clue of the *unbelieving Jews*, which Horsley had dropped, and pursues it with great diligence. *Ibid.* p. 294—313.

† Preface to the Author of *Charity Maintained*, sec. 17. In support of this assertion, Chillingworth refers to Hosius *De Author. Sac. I. iii. p. 53*; to

was in the creeds, and therefore must be defended. Tradition was invoked with success, but without any appeal to the authority of Scripture. Wolzogenius has collected the sentiments of several writers of the Romish Church, a few specimens of which shall here be adduced.

Petavius, in his celebrated work on the trinity, speaks as follows. "Concerning the three persons of the divinity, and their essence, nothing was fully written or known, before the council of Nice, because this mystery was not revealed and confirmed, till after the contest between the Arians and Catholics."* Sacroboscus tells us, also, that as the Arians appealed to the Scriptures in support of their opinions, they were not condemned by the Scriptures, but by tradition.† The Jesuit Scarga writes, that the "Apostles were at first accustomed to conceal the dogma of the trinity on account of its difficulty;" and that Paul did not preach the deity of Christ to the Athenians, lest they should think he meant to introduce a multitude of Gods.‡ According to Bellarmine, "since the Arians could not be convinced out of the Scriptures, because they interpreted them differently from the Catholics, they were condemned by the

Huntlaeus, *De Verbo Dei*, c. 19; to Gretserus, Zannerus, Vega, Possevin, Wickus, and others.

* *De Trinitate*, lib. i. cap. 1. sec. 3.

† *Concilii Nicaeni Patres ex doctrina non scripta, sed per manus Patrum sibi tradita, eos damnarunt. Defensio Trid. Concil. cap. 6.*

‡ *Apostoli dogma trinitatis initio reticere soliti sunt, propter ipsius difficultatem.*

unwritten word of God, piously understood."* In commenting on the text, in which Christ tells his disciples, that he has many things to say to them, which they cannot hear, Salmeron says he refers to the three persons in one God, and the two natures in Christ.† Remundus warns the Lutherans and Calvinists, that if they rely on the Scriptures alone, they will be obliged to yield to the modern Arians, not less than were the Fathers to the Arians of old, and he admonishes them to take refuge in tradition, and the consent of the church.‡

From these sentiments of Trinitarian writers, it is obvious, that, whatever may have been their zeal for a trinity, it was a common opinion in the Catholic Church, that this doctrine was not to be supported from the Scriptures. Let all due allowance be made for their love of tradition, it will hardly be urged, that this fondness would make them contented with resting so important a dogma on tradition alone, if they felt secure in having a just claim to the additional and irresistible weight of the revealed word of God. And least of all, as Wolzogenius observes, would they have used this argument to those, who put no confidence in any tradition not sanctioned by the plain language of the Bible. All parties

* *De Verbo Dei*, lib. IV, cap. 3.

† *Comment. in Joh. XVI, 12.*

‡ *Historia de Ortu et Progressu Haeres.* part I. lib. 2, cap. 15.

For these testimonies and others to the same purpose, see Wolzogen's *Praeparat. ad Util. Section. Librorum Nov. Test. cap. 29.* See, also, *Unitarian Miscellany*, Vol. I. p. 329—332. Vol. II. p. 81—90.

held up the Scriptures as their standard, and if the Catholic doctors had believed them to contain the trinity, it would seem the part of wisdom and policy, if nothing else, first to entrench themselves with this authority, and then to build up the outworks of tradition.

Many distinguished Trinitarian writers among the early Lutherans, were of opinion, that their doctrine could not be found in the Old Testament. Wolzogenius mentions particularly the learned Calixtus, professor of theology at Helmstadt, and also Dreger, Leterman, Behm, and some others.

If we turn to the early Arminians, we shall be disappointed in searching for any evidence from which it can be inferred, that they believed the trinity to be a plain doctrine of the Bible. “Lamy tells us, that Episcopius, whom he designates as the ‘chief pillar of the Arminian party,’ did not consider a belief in the trinity and incarnation, necessary to salvation, ‘because, according to him, they are *not to be found in the Scripture in a clear and plain manner*, no more than other opinions, which divide christians.’* These sentiments are contained in his Theo-

* Lamy's History of Socinianism, translated by Webster, p. 146, Lond. 1729. Lamy is not always to be trusted; he wrote with prejudice and a false zeal. It was a fond wish of his to make out the Arminians to be “real Socinians.” He walked in the steps of Jurieu, and with as little success.

Henry Taylor says, that “Episcopius and Cudworth condemned those of undeniable tritheism, who make the Son and Spirit in all things equal to the Father.” *Ben Mordecai's Apology*, Vol. I. p. 72.

“Episcopius,” says Dr. Horsley, “though himself no Socinian, very indiscreetly concurred with the Socinians of his time in maintaining, that the opinion of the mere humanity of Christ, had prevailed very generally in the

logical Institutes, which were highly commended by Grotius, and even Father Mabillon, and defended by Le Clerc against Jurieu and Bossuet. But what is quite as strong evidence in this case as can be desired, is, that the Arminians never imposed the trinity as a necessary article of faith for christian communion. It is not contained in Limborch's seven rules of Fundamentals; and Le Clerc says expressly, that 'they proffer communion to all, who receive the sacred Scriptures as the only rule of their faith and conduct, and who are neither idolaters nor persecutors.* In short, I am convinced, no proof can be advanced, that the early writers among the Arminians, such as Grotius, Episcopius, Vorstius, and Le Clerc, considered the doctrine of the trinity as plainly taught in the Scriptures, or as a necessary article of Christian faith.'† Without doubt the Arminians believed themselves to be Trinitarians in some sense, but it is clear, that they did not consider the doctrine

first ages, and was never deemed heretical by the Fathers of the orthodox persuasion; at least, not in such degree as to exclude from the communion of the church." *Charge to the Clergy*, p. 22.

* Ils offrent la communion à tous ceux, qui reçoivent l'écriture sainte comme la seule règle de la foi et des moeurs, et qui ne sont ni idolâtres ni persecuteurs. *Biblioth. Ancien. et Mod. Tom. XXV.* p. 110.

Le Clerc says nearly the same thing in the Dedication of his Translation of Hammond's Paraphrase and Commentary, to the Arminian Clergy of Holland.

Profiteri soletis in eucharisticae coenae celebratione, vos eam minimè pro dissensionis signo ac vexillo habere, eosque dumtaxat ab ea à vobis excludi, qui idolatria sunt contaminati, qui minimè habent Scripturam pro fidei norma, qui in impuris moribus sancta Christi præcepta conculcant, aut qui denique alios religionis causâ vexant. *Hammond. à Cler. p. 3 Dedicat. Edit. Secund. 1714.*

† Unitarian Miscellany, Vol. II. p. 92.

fundamental, and it would be a hard matter to tell what kind of a trinity they approved.

Nor among Calvinists and Trinitarians of later times have there been wanting those, who confessed the silence, or at least the obscurity of the Bible on this subject. The zealous and violently orthodox Jurieu, who ranked a denial of the trinity among the greatest possible heresies, did not pretend, that this doctrine was known in its proper shape till the council of Nice. He proves from the ancients, that, during the three first centuries, the opinion was universal, that the Son was not equal to the Father, nor his existence of the same duration.*

Dr. Watts, while he was yet a Trinitarian, confessed, that our Saviour spoke of himself with reserve, when alluding to the mystery of his nature. When the young man called Jesus, *good master*, he said in reply, “Why callest thou me good? There is none good but one, and that is God.”† Since he chides the young man for ascribing to him an attribute, which he tells him belongs only to the Supreme Being, no words could be more explicit in testifying, that he was not himself that Being. Dr. Watts felt the difficulty, and ventured on the following explanation. “Our Saviour did not choose to publish his own divinity, or oneness with God, in plain and express terms to the people, but generally by such *methods*

* Ben Mord. Apol. Vol. I, p. 46. Jortin’s remarks on Ecclesiastical History, Vol II, p. 29.

† Matth. XIX, 17.

*of inquiry and insinuation.”** That is, according to this example, by *insinuating*, that he was not what he actually was. And the same will follow from many other parts of Scripture, where, if Christ were God, his language was calculated to deceive the people. Watts does not stop with the trinity, but extends the designed ambiguity of our Saviour’s language to other doctrines, and especially to the atonement. When he preached this doctrine, says Watts, it was “rather in secret to his disciples, or, if in public, it was generally in dark sayings, and parables, and mystical expressions.”† In most cases such a mode of explanation and defence would be thought no better than giving up the point. Watts, however, in imitation of the Fathers, makes a merit of his difficulties, and charges them all to the prudence and caution of the Saviour. One of the most remarkable things about the matter is, that he could not persuade his conscience to approve the exercise of Christian Charity towards those, who could not see as he did this doctrine taught by the Saviour only in *secret*, in *dark sayings*, and *mystical expressions*. There never was a more striking instance of the power of orthodoxy to narrow the mind, and shut up the heart.‡

In Bishop Smalridge’s Sermon on the Use of Reason, after speaking of the trinity as described in the Articles, Liturgy, and Creeds, he observes, “It must

* Watts’s Works, Vol. III, p. 621, Lond. 1810, 4to.

† Watts’s Works, Vol. III, p. 637.

‡ Ibid. p. 578.

be owned that this doctrine is not in so many words taught in the Holy Scriptures. What we profess in our prayers, we nowhere read in Scripture, that the one God, the one Lord, is not only one person, but three persons in one substance. But although these truths are not read in Scripture, yet they may easily, regularly, and undeniably be *inferred* from Scripture. If, indeed, it can be shown, that these inferences are wrong, they may safely be rejected.”* Atterbury advances similar sentiments, and seems to think it an advantage to Christianity, that this doctrine and others should be expressed so obscurely. It affords a trial of our faith, which we could not have, if all were plain and positive; and, therefore, it is rather a benefit, than otherwise, that the trinity should be partially and darkly made known in the Scriptures.†

Such have been the opinions of many of the most learned and respectable Trinitarians in all ages of the christian church; they have defended the trinity not on the ground of its being clearly taught, but solely as a doctrine of *tradition*, or of *inference*. Some have inclined to one, and some to the other, according to the period and country in which they lived. When tradition was more in vogue than at present, this was made to bear the burden of proof; but when, in the progress of inquiry and knowledge, this refuge of the dark ages was stripped of its au-

* Smalridge’s Sermons, Folio, p. 348.

† Atterbury’s Sermons and Discourses on Several Subjects and Occasions, Vol. III, p. 266. 267.

thority, a broader foundation was to be sought out for the trinity; The Bible was now taken up in earnest; where the trinity was once seen darkly, even by the keen eyes of wisdom and learning, it now came out in such bright and imposing colours as to be distinctly perceived by the shortest vision; it was discovered to be at the bottom of every religious truth; from the first verse of Genesis to the last chapter of Revelations, the whole Bible was full of the trinity.

It is worthy of special observation, however, that it has never been formally defended as a plain doctrine of Scripture; nor in Christendom is there a creed in which it is expressed in Scripture language; nor is it ever defined in this language by those who are loudest in proclaiming it a plain Scripture doctrine. It is deduced by *inference*, and inference only. When the matter is brought to the test, it is not pretended, that Christ is ever called God, the same being as the Father, or the Supreme Jehovah. All that is pretended comes to no more than this, that many things are said of Christ, which it is supposed could not be said of him if he were not God. This is called an argument, and then follows the *inference*, that he was God. So in regard to the Holy Spirit, to which certain characteristics are ascribed, that are supposed to be peculiar to the Supreme Being, and hence comes the *inference*, that the Holy Spirit is God. Hitherto we have three Gods, and the labour of *inferring* must be continued, or the unity will be destroyed. It must be *inferred*, that the Son

is the same being as the Father ; and again it must be *inferred*, that the Holy Spirit is the same being as the Father, and also the same being as the Son. We are now arrived at what is called a trinity in unity, and the point has been gained by building up inference on inference with very little aid from the express words of Scripture.

It is now time to ask on what authority such a doctrine is set up as a fundamental article of faith, without believing which, no man can be entitled to the christian name, or received into fellowship. In what part of the Bible are we encouraged to dictate our inferences to others, as rules of faith, and guides to salvation ? And if we have any such authority, why stop with the inference of the trinity ? Surely proof will not now be demanded, that all truths necessary to salvation are taught with the utmost explicitness and perspicuity in the Scriptures. The trinity is not thus taught ; many persons perceive no vestiges of it ; others see it but darkly ; to others it is enveloped in absolute mystery ; and even the most sagacious are obliged to content themselves with drawing it out by induction and inference. To impose such an article on others, as a condition of christian privileges, is an outrage on religious liberty and right, which is met with an ample rebuke in the instructions and example of the Saviour. Whoever commits this outrage may well be said, in the language of Whitby, “ to be plainly guilty of adding to the word of God, and making that necessary to

salvation, which our one lawgiver never made so."* Let the trinity be believed by those, who think it true, but let it not be enforced as a stumbling block to the weak, an apple of discord to the strong, and a root of bitterness to all.

Jeremy Taylor speaks well to this purpose. He grants, that any man has a right to extend his creed as far as he chooses, and that individuals and churches may draw inferences from established articles for their own edification, but "no such deduction," he adds, "is fit to be pressed on others as an article of faith, and every deduction which is so made, unless it be such a thing as is at first evident to all, is but sufficient to make a human faith, nor can it amount to a divine, much less can be obligatory to bind a person of a different persuasion to subscribe, under pain of losing his faith, or being a heretic." And again, "if the sense be uncertain, we can no more be obliged to believe it in a certain sense, than we are to believe it at all, if we are not certain that God delivered it. But if it be only certain that God spoke it, and not certain to what sense, our faith of it is to be as indeterminate as its sense, and it can be no other in the nature of the thing, nor is it consonant to God's justice to believe of him, that he can or will require more."† These views are rational; they accord with the nature of God, with common sense, and with Scripture.

* Discourse V, appended to the *Last Thoughts*, p. 179.

† Liberty of Prophesying, Sec. I. On the Nature of Faith, p. 18, 19.

All moral action is voluntary ; force may produce acquiescence, but not conviction ; the bugbear of heresy and the terrors of excommunication may make a weak man a hypocrite, but will never convert a bad one from the error of his ways ; to compel a man to assent to a trinity, which he cannot believe, may hold him in the ranks of orthodoxy, but will never reconcile him to the dominion of virtue ; to convince him that faith in a mystery is essential to salvation may easily incite him to be a credulous bigot, but will not add light or warmth to his piety, nor activity to his benevolence. The trinity has a mischievous tendency by being clothed with a factitious importance, and raised to a place among christian doctrines to which it has no claims ; that is, if we are to judge of the importance of a doctrine by the clearness and solemnity with which it is taught in the Gospel. If true, as Trinitarians believe, the peace and prosperity of the church require, that it should be kept as much out of sight as in the days of the Saviour and the Apostles. Instead of promoting conciliation, harmony, and good fellowship, it is made a source of ceaseless division and discord ; and such has always been its consequence from the time it was first publicly introduced as an article of christian faith.

As to the origin of the trinity, it can be ascertained with as much precision as almost any historical fact of the primitive ages of christianity. It sprung from several causes, and many incidental events conspired to bring it to maturity. Nearly all the early

converts had been heathens, educated in the worship of deified men, as well as of gods of a higher order. We know, that the greatest scandal, which was thought to rest on the religion of Jesus, was the low origin and ignominious death of its author ; this scandal would be removed by making him a god ; and his extraordinary works, and the purity of his life, gave him as high a claim to this distinction, in the opinion of the heathens, as others who had been deified. It is certain, that some did consider him in this light before their conversion, and it was quite natural, that their prejudice should continue afterwards. History tells us, that Tiberius proposed to enrol him among the gods of Rome, and was prevented only by the opposition of the senate.*

Nor is it to be forgotten, that when the council of Nice decreed, that the Son was consubstantial with the Father, a very large portion of the christian world were gentile converts. The celebrated Hindoo reformer, Rammohun Roy, whose name is never to be mentioned but with the highest respect for his character and learning, has examined this subject with acuteness. He concludes his inquiry by saying, “ If some of the heathens, from the nature of their superstitions, could rank Jesus among their false gods, it is no wonder if others, when nominally converted to christianity, should have placed him on an equality with the true God, and should have passed a decree, constituting him one of the persons of the God-

* Mosheim's Ecclesiastical History, Part I. chap. IV. sec. 7.

head.”* When the deity of Christ had become established, the philosophers easily constructed a trinity out of the three principles of Plato, by yielding to their well known propensity to make as many parts as possible of the new religion conform to their old opinions ; and it is not a matter of surprise, that within a century after the council of Nice, another council should decree the deity of the Holy Spirit.

LETTER III.

Moral Tendency of a Belief in the Trinity.

SIR,

As the doctrine of the trinity embraces no moral precepts, nor immediate rules of action, its good or evil tendency must depend on the power it exerts in giving a tone and bias to the mind favourable or unfavourable to just notions of the Deity, to the reception of moral truth, a reverence for the known laws of God, a respect for the voice of conscience, and a habitual frame of piety and benevolence. It has a very remote bearing, if any at all, on the clearness and obligation of the preceptive and practical part

* Second Appeal to the Christian Public, in Defence of the Precepts of Jesus, p. 170 ; printed at the Baptist Mission Press, Calcutta, 1821.

of religion. Trinitarians and Unitarians are equally convinced of the divine origin, and absolute truth of every thing which the Saviour taught ; they equally consider all his ordinances and precepts as imposing commands, which must be implicitly obeyed. Hence it is, that neither a belief, nor disbelief of the doctrine has any tendency to diminish or strengthen the authority of the christian religion, as it relates to the necessity of obedience, repentance, reformation, and a holy life.

We are not hence to infer, that the trinity is an error of no consequence. All error is injurious. Of truth we can say with certainty, that it will always lead to good ends ; error, on the contrary, however innocent in itself, must be pernicious in its results. It cannot be doubted, that many christians have been good and pious with erroneous creeds, but it is a case equally indubitable, that they would have been better with true ones. The criminality, and the evil of error are very different things ; a man is compelled to believe according to his convictions ; he may be deceived ; many evils may follow from this deception, but no crime can be attached, unless there has been a culpable indolence, or a perverted will ; or some unhallowed purpose in forming opinions. A belief in the trinity involves no crime ; its iniquity consists in its evil consequences ; it obscures the perfections of the Deity, obstructs the current of devotional feeling, perplexes the humble inquirer after truth, and thus essentially impairs the means and motives of a rational worship, practical piety and vital godliness.

In the first place, the notion of the trinity destroys the simplicity of worship, and essentially weakens all the good effects, which we may expect to derive from a pure and spiritual devotion. If there be one precept in the Scriptures, more positive than any other, it is, that the undivided homage of men is due to ONE BEING, to the Supreme God alone. It was the command of our Saviour himself, "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and *him only* shalt thou serve." "True worshippers," he tells us, "shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth."^{*} We are to adore and reverence him as our Creator, to praise him as the source of all good, to love and thank him for his paternal care and kindness. As he is the sole author of all things, he is to receive our sole homage, submission, gratitude. In the dispensations of providence, and in the christian religion, no feature is so striking, as that which manifests the existence of one supreme object of worship, one God of infinite perfections, who claims all our services.

How do we retain this great characteristic of our religion, in what respect do we obey the commands of Christ, when we make three objects of worship, when we lift up our voices in adoration and prayer to three separate beings, and address them each as the supreme, self-existent, independent God? When you offer prayers to God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Ghost, let it be admitted, that you do not consider them three Gods, although each is

* Matth. IV, 10.—John IV, 23.

called God ; you must, notwithstanding, have a notion of three distinct beings at the time of your devotions, and address them as such. You worship three Gods in form and imagination, that is, in reality, so far as your conceptions of the Deity present an object to the understanding.

You do not see God, and you must worship him under such properties, as you are able to conceive and combine to form his nature and character. If you have in your mind three separate beings, possessing each the same properties as the others, and address them as separate, equal beings, and under different titles, it is certain, that the nature of your worship, and its effects on the mind and character, will be precisely the same, as if you acknowledged yourself to be worshipping three Gods. From this kind of worship, two evils of no common magnitude follow ; first, the crime of disobeying a divine command, in not acting the part of "true worshippers," who, our Saviour tells us, worship the FATHER ; secondly, all the practical ill consequences, which flow from having three objects of religious worship instead of one.*

* The following extract is from the Litany used in the Episcopal Church.

"O God, the Father of Heaven, have mercy upon us, miserable sinners.

"O God, the Son, Redeemer of the world, have mercy upon us, miserable sinners.

"O God, the Holy Ghost, proceeding from the Father and the Son, have mercy upon us, miserable sinners.

"O holy, blessed, and glorious Trinity, three persons and one God, have mercy upon us, miserable sinners."

If we are to understand language in its common acceptation, the above extract inculcates the worship of four Gods. The Father, the Son, the Holy

Unitarians avoid these evils by adhering rigidly to simplicity and unity in their worship. With them, God is believed to be one being; they worship him in his undivided and infinitely perfect character; their love and gratitude, adoration and reverence, confidence and joy, all centre in him. They dare not ascribe to any other being the honours and glory, which the Scriptures every where command us to render to the Father. They adore his goodness for the means, which he has provided for our salvation through the instructions of his Son. They honour Christ as the appointed Saviour, whom God endowed in an eminent degree with the gifts of his spirit, with the strength of his power, with the light of his wisdom and truth; they feel towards him all the veneration, gratitude, and affection, which his heavenly office, his sublime instructions, his trials and sufferings justly demand; but they do not worship him as God, because the Scriptures teach, and reason verifies the truth, that there is but “ONE GOD, the FATHER,” who requires our unceasing and undivided service. Jesus himself always prayed to the Father, and said to his disciples in terms which it would seem impossible to mistake, “in that day ye shall ask ME nothing; whatsoever ye shall ask the FATHER in my name, HE will give it you.”* Can you have a plainer declaration, that the Father *only* is to be worshipped? From views like the above, Unitarians

Spirit, and the Trinity, are here worshipped separately, and respectively, under the title of God.

* John xvi. 23.

are strengthened in the belief that their system of faith is true, that it has greatly the advantage of the Trinitarian scheme in securing a pure and scriptural worship, promoting love to God, and kindling the fervour of a steady piety.

Again, the Trinitarian faith not only makes the Son equal with the Father, sharing the same glory, and entitled to the same homage and love, but actually raises him higher, and clothes him with a more adorable, lovely, and beneficent character. It is an important part of this system, that man, by transgression, was “bound over to the *wrath* of God, and curse of the law.”* Under this state of wrath, the Father was resolved to have vengeance on his weak and offending children, and would not suffer his anger to be appeased except by the sacrifice of the Son, who offered himself a willing victim to temper the vindictive rage, which threatened destruction and torment to the whole human race. It is to the compassion and benevolence of the Son alone, that we are indebted for the mercy of God. We owe it not to the purpose of the Father, that we have not been consumed by his anger; the Son is the voluntary, the unassisted author of our rescue, and in this character is worthy of our supreme homage, at the expense of every sentiment and feeling of love, gratitude, and reverence, to which God, acting the part of a Father, would be entitled. What good tendency on the practical morals and piety of christians do

* Confession of Faith, chap. vi. § 6.

you discover in a doctrine, which blots out all the moral attributes of the Deity, makes him an angry, vindictive, and cruel being, and clothes another with the ensigns of his supremacy and perfection? What do you find in such a doctrine, which is calculated to quicken devotion, provoke to good works, establish charity, or to invigorate any of the christian virtues?

Moreover, the notion that Christ was God destroys the force of his example. One of the most encouraging assurances, that the precepts of the Gospel are suited to our nature, condition, and improvement, is exhibited in the conduct of Jesus. We read the history of his life, attend him amidst the perils he encountered, the sufferings he endured; we contemplate with admiration the immaculate purity of his character, his disregard of the world and its attractions; we behold his piety, benevolence, meekness, forbearance; we discover in his life a perfect illustration of his doctrines and precepts. To this character we look as an illustrious model of moral excellence, at once commanding our imitation, and serving as a guide to our steps.

All this is a delusion if Christ were the Supreme God; no points of resemblance exist between God and man, from which the example of the former can be made a motive of action to the latter. If Christ were God, it cost him nothing to resist temptation; for he could not be tempted. That he refrained from sin under many trying circumstances is no proof, that we can refrain under similar ones. According

to the Trinitarian theory, therefore, the example of Christ was totally without value, for it was impossible for him to be any other than a holy being ; and in practising his exalted virtues he was only yielding a necessary compliance with the principles and laws of his nature.

This result is adverse to the account given by the Apostles. St. Paul says, “ It behooved him to be made in all things like unto his brethren ;” and that, “ he was in all points tempted like as we are.”* In this character his spotless example is such as we may and ought to follow. He was made like us, “ touched with the feelings of our infirmities,” tempted as we are, and exposed to the same evils and trials. He was without sin, not because it was impossible for him to sin, but because he exercised with an unfailing resolution and firmness the power he possessed of resisting temptation, moderating his desires, and complying with all the divine laws ; the perfection of his character consisted in his deeds of active piety and goodness. All men have a similar power, and are capable of similar deeds ; not in the same degree, but of the same kind. Hence the example of Christ is adapted to the human condition, and affords a motive to the obedience of his laws ; the moment you suppose him to be God, the example and the motive vanish.

Much ingenuity has been exercised in attempts to remove this difficulty, by striving to make it appear,

* Heb. ii. 17, iv. 15.

that Christ was God and man united; but even admitting the fact of this inexplicable union, which seems to have been at first devised for the purpose of reconciling discrepancies, it does not take away the difficulty in the present instance. The Apostle speaks of "*one Lord Jesus Christ*," and of "*one mediator between God and men*." However his nature was constituted, he was *one* being. If he was God, he must have possessed all the attributes and perfections of God; if he could be tempted in his human nature, he possessed an unlimited power of resistance in the divine, a power, which no human being, nor any other being but God, could possess. His perfection as God could not be obscured by adding the human nature; nor by this appendage was he brought any nearer in his moral attributes and capacity to the condition of man. It is still the example of God, which we behold in his life, an example, which we have neither power nor hope to imitate.

This doctrine of two natures, which is a main prop in the edifice of the trinity, is not every where so passive and inefficient. It fails of any good effects where its aid is most needed by its advocates; in other quarters it is active and desolating; it renders useless all rules of interpretation, and makes the language of Christ ambiguous and contradictory. It represents him as speaking in two characters, sometimes as God, sometimes as man, without intimating in which character. Pursue this notion to its consequences; as man he might be mistaken like other men: he has in no single instance given a hint by

which we can be certain in which character he spoke, but he uniformly acted and conversed as one being, possessed of one nature, and sustaining one character. By what rule shall we judge? One reads his words, and says it is God that speaks; another says it is man. Who shall decide? Or how shall it be proved, that he did not utter the language, and speak with the wisdom of man only, when he published the doctrine of a future state, or any other of the doctrines of revelation. Do you say, that the divine nature always controlled the human in these cases? How do you know? You can only decide by your arbitrary opinion, and every man may do the same. That is, no other rule appears than the fancy, caprice, and prejudices of men. In short, this doctrine of the double nature of Christ introduces uncertainty and confusion into the whole scheme of revelation; it leaves no safe ground for the humble christian to stand on; it carries destruction equally to the moral precepts, and revealed doctrines of the gospel.

Trinitarians are apt to dwell much on the humility of Christ in descending from the glory of the heavens, taking up his abode with men, submitting to the pains and hardships of a life of sufferings on earth, for the noble and benevolent purpose of procuring the salvation of mankind. They make this a ground of love and affectionate gratitude, and conceive that the ardour and effects of their emotions are much increased, by the conviction of the supreme deity of Christ. But how can they talk of the hu-

mility of the unchangeable God? Can the Being who is the same from everlasting to everlasting, and whose perfections are as immutable as his nature, can such a Being humble himself, lay aside his attributes, and take upon him the nature of a frail, sinful man? Such a supposition is at war with every dictate of the understanding, and every feeling of the heart; in this view the humiliation of Christ is imaginary; it is impossible; it affords no rational incitements of love, sympathy, or gratitude. But "it is our belief, that Christ's humiliation was real and entire, that the whole Saviour, and not a part of him, suffered, that his crucifixion was a scene of deep and unmixed agony. As we stand round his cross, our minds are not distracted, nor our sensibility weakened, by contemplating him as composed of incongruous and infinitely differing minds, and as having a balance of infinite felicity. We recognize, in the dying Jesus, but one mind. This, we think, renders his sufferings, and his patience and love in bearing them, incomparably more impressive and affecting, than the system we oppose."* Here are just and forcible reasons for being deeply affected with the humiliation and sufferings of Christ; we consider him a being who was capable of suffering, and who voluntarily submitted to it for our sake.

One reason more shall be added, why the trinity has an unfavourable tendency with respect to piety and moral excellence. It is allowed by all christians,

* Rev. Dr. Channing's Ordination Sermon at Baltimore, p. 26.

that a special object of the Messiahship of Jesus, was to make known and confirm the certainty of a future state, to open the prospects of immortality, and to fit men for an existence in another world. All our hopes as christians are built on the belief of a resurrection of the dead, and another state of being. Whence do we derive this belief? Wholly from the death and resurrection of Christ; according to the reasoning of the apostle, "If there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen; and if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain. Yea, and we are found false witnesses of God; because we have testified of God, that he raised up Christ; whom he raised not up, if so be the dead rise not."* Here, it seems, the resurrection of men is argued from the resurrection of Christ. What force would be in this argument, if Christ were God; or what possible reason should we have for the consoling belief, that we shall revive from the sleep of death, because he has revived, "and become the first fruits of them that slept?" For if God, or, which is the same thing, a person who was truly God, could have died and arisen from the dead, we cannot hence infer, that we shall rise, any more than that we can create ourselves anew, or do any other act of omnipotence. Take the character which the Apostle gives of Christ; consider him as subject from his nature to suffering and death, as acting by the power of the Father, and not of himself;

* 1 Cor. xv. 13, 14, 15.

believe his own words when he speaks of his dependence, his limited knowledge and faculties ; the argument then becomes an irresistible one. As God raised him from the dead, we have as convincing a proof as we can have, that he will raise us likewise ; and on this substantial ground rests our hope of future safety and glory.

The weight and value of this argument are increased, when it is considered as furnishing a motive to obedience and holiness. If any thing will subdue the hardness of the sinner's heart, and awaken him to a sense of the folly and danger of sin; if any thing will quicken the sensibility of conscience, and impress the laws of heaven on the understanding, it is the certainty of a future judgment, a state of being where justice will raise her impartial scales, and award to each the precise measure of his deserts. The strength of this motive, and its influence on the mind and practice of every individual, will be in exact proportion to the conviction he feels, that the soul will exist hereafter, receive a just retribution from its maker, know the pains of depravity and vice, and the joys of conscious innocence and purity. The system of faith, which adds the greatest force to the argument for a resurrection, will be the best calculated to give efficacy to this motive, and thus advance the great purpose of the christian religion ; but from what has been said, it is quite obvious that the trinity, even if it be true, lends no help to such a system.

I have thus taken a short view of the influence of the trinity on some of the prominent principles of

christian faith and practice. With what accuracy it has been done, I willingly leave to be decided by the candour and judgment of every reader; I have been obliged to content myself with hints only, but they embrace a compass of argument, in which may be included almost every branch and article of the orthodox faith. The trinity is a kind of trunk, which gives being and nourishment to the whole; and to me it would seem, that the evil consequences of this doctrine, if they were not checked by others more rational in their nature, and practical in their tendency, would overthrow the whole system of revelation, and leave nothing but a heartless infidelity or gloomy skepticism behind. The doctrine of the divine unity, in its simple form, is encumbered with none of these evils; it admits the authority of Jesus, and all he has revealed, taught, commanded, and promised, to operate with undiminished power on the understanding and affections of believers.

LETTER IV.

*General Remarks on the Doctrine of Atonement, with
a brief Outline of the Opinions of Unitarians on this
Subject.*

SIR,

AMONG the articles, which you enumerate as constituting the *essence* of christianity, is the *doctrine of atonement*. Whatever may be thought of any doctrine called by this name, all christians must allow, that the object, which it is supposed to accomplish, is of the greatest importance. To one, who believes with confidence and joy in the divine origin and truth of the Gospel dispensation, no subject can be more solemn, none more interesting, than that relating to salvation through Jesus Christ. Whoever believes in him as the Son of God, the Mediator between God and men, and whoever receives the truths of his revelation, as the truths of heaven, must believe, that the sole purpose of his coming into the world was to redeem men from iniquity, to save them from sin, to reconcile them to God, and procure the divine pardon and favour.

If the subject be viewed at large, as intimately connected with the doctrine of salvation through the agency of Jesus Christ, every sincere believer in him

must be impressed with nearly an equal sense of its importance. Every such believer will study the Scriptures earnestly and devoutly to know wherein Christ is a Saviour, or in what salvation through him consists; that is, to know the terms on which Jesus and his Apostles have declared, that the sins of men shall be forgiven, and final acceptance with God shall be gained. In the strength of this faith, in the desire of this knowledge, and in the ardour of inquiry, it has not been made to appear, nor can it be made to appear, that Unitarians are in any degree behind the orthodox.

They are often charged with denying the doctrine of atonement, and assailed with great warmth by their opponents for this supposed defect of faith, or perverseness of will. The persons, by whom this charge is preferred, no doubt deserve the credit of sincerity and zeal, and their solicitude ought to be considered praiseworthy, when it makes no trespass on the christian virtues of humility and charity. But most unfortunately, this trespass has too often been the besetting fault of those anxious guardians of the true faith, whose benevolent concern has prompted them to so unwelcome a task, as that of passing censure and lifting up the voice of reprobation against others. Moderation, respect for the understanding of others, charity for their weakness, and proper regard for their motives and sense of duty, seem scarcely to mingle with the virtues which our opponents allow themselves to harbour and practise, when they are once embarked in this undertaking. They as-

sume a tone, and take a liberty, which, in fallible men, can hardly be accounted for without supposing them really to believe all truth, wisdom, and honesty to be on their side. Under such circumstances, it is not surprising, that zeal should frequently overleap the bounds of knowledge, and the current of imagination and feeling, heightened by the pride of self estimation, should carry away the landmarks of good sense and sound judgment. Let it be allowed as possible, that Unitarians have the use of their understanding, and entertain opinions on this subject, which they value as most sacred truths, the grounds of present consolation and of future hope ; let this be allowed, and there would certainly be some room for moderation even amidst the bright burnings of zeal, some space for considerate thought and gentle forbearance even in the troubled tide of feeling and passion.

But without daring to hope for so happy a result, it may not be amiss to glance for a moment at the actual grounds and consistency of this charge of crime, which has been brought forward with so much confidence, and pressed with so much heat against Unitarians, for not believing what the orthodox call the atonement. To what, in its most aggravated shape, does it amount ? In what respect does it affect the christian character ?

In the first place, the charge rests on the principle, that the doctrine of atonement is of such a peculiar kind, as to render a *belief* in it absolutely essential to salvation. Now it cannot be supposed, that serious

Unitarians feel less concern about the salvation of their souls, and the means of attaining this salvation, than serious Trinitarians; yet, by no depth of search are they able to find, either in the reason of the thing, or in the Scriptures, that such a faith, as an abstract article of belief, is essential to a saving knowledge of the christian truths. What shall they do? Would you have them violate conscience, pervert the word of God, blot out the sense of right, and refuse assent to their judgment, that they may admit a position, involving sacred and important consequences, in defiance of reason and every moral and religious principle? The charge implies the necessity of such an act on their part, and I submit to you, whether this would be more likely to increase or diminish the measure of religious attainments, which they already possess.

Again, if no one can be saved, who does not believe in the atonement, must it not be settled what this faith in the atonement is? Must not this be single, or the same in every individual? Or has this kind of faith various degrees and certain limits, within which whosoever comes will be secure? If so, where are these limits? If not, which is the identical kind of faith on which you would impress the stamp of safety? When you come to particulars, nothing is more obvious, than the total disagreement of the orthodox themselves. They agree in telling you, that they look for salvation through the merits of Christ; but when inquiry is made about the *nature of these merits*, the means and manner of

this salvation, you discover almost as many notions and theories as individuals. Every one has a faith peculiar to himself, marked in some respects with very broad distinctions. Yet there can be but one *true belief* in the atonement, and if any one be essential to salvation it must be this. It follows, that no such importance belongs to faith in the atonement, as the advocates of this doctrine attach to it ; or if it do, as difference always implies error, no one even among the orthodox can justly hope for salvation, since it is by no means probable, that God has made a belief in error a requisite to the rewards of his glory. The inference is, that our opponents are unreasonable in the alarms, which they raise ; and if there be any truth in the principle on which they act, it is much more important for them to bestow their concern on themselves, and endeavour to correct their own faith, than to bewail the unhappy lot of Unitarians for not believing things, to which their conscience and understanding cannot be forced to assent.

I know not why a rule should be followed in regard to this doctrine, which will not apply to every other article of faith ; and certainly, till the moral attributes of God, and the moral agency of man be destroyed, it can never be made a condition of favour with the Almighty, that a man shall believe what he *cannot* believe. We have derived from our Maker the faculties by which we are enabled to think, investigate, and draw conclusions ; we are accountable to him for the right use of these facul-

ties, but not for their strength, nor the degree of natural light which they afford. Whoever seeks truth conscientiously, will be rewarded for his search, although he may fail of his object ; and this is no less true of the atonement, than of other points of faith. When it can be proved, that Unitarians do not thus seek, that they have less concern for their own spiritual welfare than others have for them ; when it can be proved, that in them the principles of human nature are inverted, inducing them to prefer misery to happiness, fatal error to saving truth, the blind paths of ignorance to the open fields of knowledge, the threatening terrors of perdition to the glorious prospects of heaven ; when these things can be proved, then may it be accounted a crime in them not to believe what they cannot believe, and to rely on the mercy and goodness of God, rather than the frail supports with which their brethren would prop them up. All they ask in respect to their faith is, to be judged by their sincerity, their humble efforts, their righteous intentions. When these do not appear, let them be condemned ; when they do, let the breath of slander be hushed, the pride of imagined infallibility humbled, the tone of haughty rebuke subdued, the voice of censure silenced.

In the remarks about to be made, it will not come within my purpose to examine the arguments on which the doctrine of atonement, as it is understood in any particular sense, is supposed to be founded. *My attention will be chiefly directed to the nature, rea-*

sonableness, and tendency of what is called the popular doctrine, as explained by its advocates, with the particular object of tracing its moral and religious influence, and comparing it with the same influence of a different faith. Unitarians believe in salvation through Jesus Christ, as firmly and joyfully as persons of any other religious persuasion ; and the question is, whether their mode of viewing and explaining this subject, be not as purifying in its nature, powerful in its action, and certain and salutary in its effects, as the doctrine under consideration ?

Before I engage in this chief branch of the subject, it will be proper to ascertain, as far as possible, what is meant by *the atonement* ; and to draw, with some precision, the line of difference between those who are said to believe, and those who disbelieve this doctrine.

It is common, nay, if I mistake not, universal with the orthodox, to represent Unitarians as putting no reliance on the death of Christ, making this event of no value in procuring salvation, and not admitting any merit or efficacy in his sufferings, but depending on their own exertions alone for reconciliation with God. This representation is essentially false. They do not all agree in opinion any more than Trinitarians, yet it may be asserted, as a universal and fundamental principle of their faith, that the death of Christ was in the highest degree important in establishing the Gospel scheme ; so important, indeed, that without it his religion could never have been introduced, nor its benefits enjoyed. In regard to the

particular effects arising from his death, its efficacy, and the extent of its influence, they have differences of opinion, but none which interferes with the principle above stated; nor in these respects do they differ so much as Trinitarians.*

That I may not be misunderstood, and that this subject may be placed in a clear light, it will be of service to make a short inquiry into the *actual state of opinions among both Unitarians and Trinitarians*. This can be fairly and satisfactorily done, by introducing examples from works of authority on both sides. I will begin with *Unitarians*.

It was the faith of the old Polish Socinian Churches, and no doubt of Unitarians generally at that period on the continent of Europe, "That Christ, by the divine will and purpose, suffered for our sins, and underwent a bloody death for an *expiatory sacrifice*."† According to their views, Christ was sent to be a pro-

* Dr. Carpenter observes, "Great stress is obviously laid in the New Testament on the death of Christ, as a means of delivering men from their sins and of reconciling them to God. I never met with any christian who denied the great importance of that event." *Unitarianism the Doctrine of the Gospel*, p. 296.

† Racovian Catechism, Sec. v. chap. 8. Again, in the same chapter, it is said, "Christ has by the will of God, shed his blood for the sins of all men; wherefore, whoever would experience God propitious, and obtain the forgiveness of his sins, must come to Christ through faith in him. This is the only refuge of all sinners."

By an *expiatory sacrifice* is meant a sacrifice, which takes away sin. *Expiation* and *propitiation* are used, as far as I can discover, by all writers on this subject, in nearly the same sense. The Greek word *ἱλασμός* is twice found in the New Testament, (John ii. 2; iv. 10.) and in each place is rendered *propitiation*, and means a deliverance from the guilt of sin. Neither the term *expiation*, nor *propitiation*, has any regard to the nature of the deliverance, or to the reasons for which it is granted.

pitiation for the sins of men; they believed in the atonement, or in the reconciliation of sinners to God, "through faith in the blood of Christ," and by his agency as our mediator and redeemer. This is repeatedly declared in the Racovian Catechism, and in other works of the most distinguished writers of the Polish Unitarian Churches. Socinus wrote largely on this subject. In one place, after answering certain charges, he adds, speaking of himself; "Not that he denies Christ to have died, that our sins may be blotted out, *for he confesses this truth as most certain, and glories in it.* And he readily allows not only, that the death of Christ, and the shedding of his blood for us, were an offering and a sacrifice for a sweet smelling savour to God, as Paul expresses it, but also, that this sacrifice may be said to have been offered for our sins, that is, for this end, that our sins might be blotted out and remitted."* Quotations to this effect might be multiplied from Socinus, Crellius, Slichtingius, Wolzogenius, Wissowatius, and other eminent writers of their time.

The sentiments of the Unitarians at the present day in Geneva and Switzerland, may be seen in the Catechism used in their churches. Three purposes are said in that Catechism to be answered by the death of Christ, namely, "To confirm his doctrine; to give an example of the sublimest virtues; and to expiate our sins." And again we are told, that "The

* Non autem ut neget idcirco moriturum esse, etc. *Vid. Socin. Oper. Tom. ii., p. 445.* For a well digested account of the opinions of Socinus "On the Death of Christ, and its Efficacy," see *Toulmin's Life of Socinus*, p. 179—209.

death of Christ is to be regarded at all times, as *the only sacrifice* capable of obtaining from God the pardon of our sins.”* In support of these views, several passages of Scripture are quoted, especially those which speak of the death of Christ as procuring a propitiation, or remission of sins.

Respecting the opinions of the early English Unitarians, no authority is better, probably, than that of Emlyn. From him we learn that they were nearly, if not entirely the same, as with the Unitarians on the continent. In alluding to their opinions, he would seem to adopt them as his own. He believed, that the sacrifice of Christ was “an acceptable and rewardable oblation to God,” in consideration of which his intercessions in his exalted state are made effectual, through his mediation with the Father, to procure pardon for the sins of men.† Dr. Samuel

* Geneva Catechism, Part II. Sec. 9.

† See Emlyn’s Works, Vol. ii. p. 44—46. Emlyn supposed that Christ’s *obedience, even to the death of the cross*, as the Apostle expresses it, (Phil. ii. 8) was an act, “with which the holy God was so pleased, that he exalted him to his right hand, and constituted him the only advocate, through whose mediation he would grant pardon and other favours to repenting sinners.” p. 102.

Such was the opinion also of the old Polish Unitarians, and their immediate followers. “By this event,” [the death of Christ] says B. Wissowatius, “and his obedience to God the Father, he was invested with supreme power over all things, and thus obtained a full right to forgive our sins and bless us with eternal life. He may therefore justly be said to have redeemed and purchased us with his blood.” *Racor. Cat.* p. 313, note.

William Penn’s views did not differ materially from those of other Unitarians at that period, if we may be allowed to judge from his remarks in *The Sandy Foundation Shaken*, where he professes to “confute from Scripture and right Reason the Vulgar Doctrine of Satisfaction, and Justification by an imputative Righteousness.” See, *Works*, 3d Ed., Vol. i. p. 19.

Clarke believed, "that the death of Christ was necessary to make the pardon of sin consistent with the wisdom of God, in his good government of the world, and to be a proper attestation of his irreconcileable hatred against all unrighteousness."* The sentiments of Henry Taylor corresponded with those of Emlyn. He believed Christ, by his sufferings and death, to have merited and received of God the power of conferring salvation and eternal life on all, who prove by a sincere repentance, and a right conduct, that they accept the conditions of his Gospel.†

John Taylor held the death of Christ to be an atonement for sin, as an expiation, or propitiation. "The sacrifice of Christ," says he, "was truly and properly in the highest degree, and far beyond any other, *peculiar and expiatory*, to make atonement for, or to take away sin."‡ It was a sacrifice by which God was induced to forgive sin, and without which forgiveness would not have been obtained. Dr. Price's views were similar. He says, "As the sacrifices under the law of Moses expiated guilt, and procured remission, so Christ's shedding his blood and offering up his life was the means of remission and favour to penitent sinners."§

* He speaks of it, also, as a means of vindicating the honour of God's laws, which had been violated by sin. See Magee on the *Doctrine of Atonement*, *Dissert.* No. xvii.—*Ben Mordecai's Apology*, Vol. ii. p. 644.

† His views may be seen at large in his *Sixth* and *Seventh Letters* in *Ben Mordecai's Apology*.

‡ Scripture Doctrine of Atonement examined, § 152.—Also Taylor's Key to the Apostolic Writings, chap. viii. Dr. Magee (*Dissert.* xvi.) has given a partial and distorted account of J. Taylor's scheme of atonement.

§ Sermons on the Christian Doctrine, p. 182.

Dr. Priestley considered the death of Christ, as a means of procuring the salvation of sinners, chiefly by giving authority to his religion, proving the divinity of his character and mission, establishing the certainty of a resurrection and a future state of just retribution, and thus presenting the strongest possible motives to penitence, piety, and holiness of character, which alone can secure the pardon and acceptance of God. Near the close of a full exposition of his opinions concerning the death of Christ, he asks, "When by this means our Lord put the finishing hand to so extensive a scheme, in which was done whatever was practicable to recover fallen man to immortal virtue and happiness, is he not with great propriety styled our redeemer, saviour, and mediator?"* As to the opinions of the English Unitarians of the present day, it needs only be said, that they accord with some or all of the views above detailed.

The same may be said of Unitarians in this country. Although they do not think alike in every particular, yet they agree in believing the death of Christ to have been essential in the Gospel scheme, and in bringing about the conversion and salvation of sinners. It will be enough to quote two or three writers of deservedly high authority. In alluding to the prevailing sentiments of Unitarians in this country, Dr. Channing says, "Some suppose, that the death of Christ contributes to our pardon, as it

* Theological Repository, 3d edit. Vol. i. p. 426. For a detection and exposure of Dr. Magee's misrepresentations of Dr. Priestley, see Carpenter's *Examination of Charges, &c. Chap. vi.*

was a principal means of confirming his religion, and of giving it a power over the mind; in other words, that it procures forgiveness by leading to that repentance and virtue, which is the great and only condition on which forgiveness is bestowed. Many of us are dissatisfied with this explanation, and think that the Scriptures ascribe the remission of sins to Christ's death with an emphasis so peculiar, that we ought to consider this event as having a special influence in removing punishment, as a condition or method of pardon, without which repentance would not avail us, at least to the extent, which is now promised by the Gospel."* After enumerating various particulars by which redemption from sin is procured through Jesus Christ, Dr. Ware concludes, "He was our redeemer by doing and suffering all, that was necessary to affect our deliverance from the power of sin, to bring us to repentance and holiness, and thus make us the fit objects of forgiveness and the favour of heaven."†

According to the faith of the Evangelical Lutheran Churches composing the Synod of New York, "Christ died on the cross, that we might have a sure pledge, that God is willing to pardon our sins, without requiring any further sacrifices, since Jesus has sacrificed himself; and finally, that he might rise again, and thus confirm our hope in a future and

* Ordination Sermon at Baltimore, p. 33.

† Letters to Trinitarians and Calvinists, p. 92.

eternal life."* These quotations together, I believe, give an accurate representation of the opinions of Unitarians in this country.

From the preceding view, three general opinions concerning the effects of Christ's death seem to prevail among Unitarians. *First*, that it was a sacrifice designed to expiate, or take away the guilt of sin, by its influence in procuring the pardon of God, which would not have been granted without such a sacrifice. *Secondly*, that for the sufferings and death of Christ he has been rewarded by the Father, in an exalted state, with supreme power to forgive sins, to make effectual intercessions for transgressors, and bestow salvation on all such as are truly penitent and worthy. *Thirdly*, that his death was chiefly instrumental in leading men to embrace his religion, obey his commands, repent of their wickedness, forsake their sins, and attain that perfect holiness of character, which God is always ready to accept and reward with pardon, and without which no man can be fitted for his future kingdom.

It will be observed, that in the view here taken, no attempt has been made either to prove or defend any particular doctrine. I have aimed at nothing more than simply to state the sentiments of Unit-

* Catechism for the Use of the Churches belonging to the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of the State of New York, drawn up by the Rev. Dr. Quitman, p. 39. I take it for granted, that these churches are Unitarian, as no allusions to a trinity are to be found, either in their Catechism, Liturgy, or the Prayers they recommend. Whether these books are approved, and used by the Evangelical Lutheran Churches in other parts of the United States I am not able to say.

rians, as they have been expressed by different authors, and held by different classes of christians.

LETTER V.

Trinitarian Views of Atonement.

SIR,

I COME now to examine the *orthodox opinions of atonement*. This task, however, can only be executed in a general manner, and to a certain extent; for the views of many writers on this side of the question are so obscure and unsettled, that you may read treatises on atonement without being able to tell, with any degree of precision, what the authors would have you understand by the word. This arises, no doubt, in some measure from the abstract nature of the subject, as well as from the indefinite notions, which these writers themselves entertain of this branch of their faith. Every man, who claims the title of orthodox, professes a belief in what he calls the atonement. For the most part, also, these professed believers join in the cry of heresy and censure against those, who do not acknowledge the same form of faith.

From this unanimity of profession and censure, it

would be reasonable to expect a unanimity of sentiment in regard to the doctrine, a disbelief of which is represented as the offending cause. In such an expectation every one will be disappointed. Not only individuals differ, but sects and parties have grown up with contending and almost opposite opinions, which have been incorporated into creeds and systems of faith, and denominated respectively the doctrine of atonement. Some of these will now be examined ; but I have room only for a few of the more prominent.

The calvinistic notion of atonement teaches, that the anger of God was so intense against his offending creatures, that he would not pardon their sins, nor receive them into favour, till his only Son, a being equal to himself, had suffered agony and death in this world, and the torments of wicked spirits in hell, to appease his wrath, and satisfy his justice. The calvinistic standard of faith tells us, that the Lord Jesus, by his perfect obedience, “*hath fully satisfied the justice of his Father;*” that God justifies sinners “*by imputing the obedience and satisfaction of Christ unto them;*” that Christ, “*by his obedience and death, did fully discharge the debt of those that are thus justified, and did make a proper, real, and full satisfaction of his Father's justice in their behalf.*” We must observe, however, that this applies only to the “*elect,* whom God did from all eternity decree to justify.” For the remainder, who were doomed to

perdition, no sacrifice was sufficient. Against them the anger of God must always burn.*

Such is the account of the atonement contained in a noted calvinistic formulary. Its great purpose is to *quell the anger and satisfy the justice of God*. Calvin adds something more, and makes its entire effect depend on the manner in which it was accomplished. He regards it *essential* to the efficacy of Christ's death, that he should be arraigned and condemned as a malefactor before a tribunal of justice. "Had he been assassinated by robbers," says Calvin, "or murdered in a popular tumult; in such a death there would have been no appearance of satisfaction. But when he is placed as a criminal before the tribunal, when he is accused and overpowered by the testimony of witnesses, and by the mouth of the judge is condemned to die; we understand from these circumstances, that he sustained the character of a malefactor."† Why it was, that the sufferings of death, undergone in conformity with the sentence of

* Confession of Faith, Chap. viii. § 5; xi. § 1, 3, 4.

Calvin remarks, in speaking of the death of Christ, that "the relation of those sufferings, which were visible to men, is very properly followed by that invisible and incomprehensible vengeance, which he suffered from the hand of God; in order to assure us, that not only the body of Christ was given as the price of our redemption, but that there was another greater and more excellent ransom, since he suffered in his soul the dreadful torments of a person condemned and irretrievably lost." *Institutes*, Book II. chap. xvi. § 10.

And again, "By contending with the power of the devil, with the dread of death, and with the pains of hell, he obtained the victory, and triumphed over them, that in death we may no longer dread those things, which our prince hath destroyed." *Ibid.* § 11.

† *Institutes*, Book ii. Chap. 16, § 5.

a wicked judge, had more merit in the eyes of the Deity, than a violent death brought about in any other way, Calvin darkly explains. That he should put so much stress on the *manner of this death* is also a little remarkable, since he affirms the bodily sufferings of Christ to have been of no avail. "If Christ had merely died a corporeal death," he observes, "no end would have been accomplished by it. It was requisite, also, that he should feel the severity of the divine vengeance, in order to appease the wrath of God, and satisfy his justice. Hence it was necessary for him to contend with the powers of hell, and eternal death."* In another place Calvin speaks of the death of Christ as a *punishment* for the sins of men, which he endured in the character of a substitute.†

This scheme of atonement has been generally held by the Universalists. They have enlarged its extent, by removing what Calvinists call the degree of election. To the notion, that God, before he created the worlds, consigned a certain portion of mankind to endless ruin and torment, they do not assent. The

* Ibid. B. ii. C. 16, § 10.

† Book ii. C. 12, § 3.

Luther expresses this notion of punishment and substitution in stronger language. "And this, no doubt," says Luther, "all the prophets did foresee in spirit, that Christ should become the *greatest transgressor, murderer, thief, rebel, and blasphemer*, that ever was or could be in all the world. For he being made a sacrifice for the sins of the whole world, is not now an innocent person and without sins; is not now the Son of God born of the Virgin Mary, but a SINNER." *Comment on Gal.* iii. 13.

For various examples of remarkable language on this subject from Luther, Calvin, Flavel, Ambrose, Baxter, Beveridge, Stockell, and others, see *Wright's Anti-Satisfactionist*, Chap. i.

sacrifice of Christ they believe a perfect satisfaction to divine justice, and an entire remedy for the disorders of sin; and thus, after the anger of God is wholly appeased, his justice wholly satisfied, and the evils of sin removed, they hold it to be a necessary operation of the goodness and mercy of God to pardon, accept, and save all men. An *infinite satisfaction*, an Almighty Surety, must, as they conceive, take away all the impurities of our mortal, frail, and erring nature. Hence, on the calvinistic principle of atonement, they believe in universal salvation. And whoever adheres to this doctrine in its calvinistic sense, and gives up election, as I believe is the case with a very large portion of the persons calling themselves Calvinists, must, if he will maintain consistency, be a Universalist.*

Another sect of christians, who are Calvinists in faith, taking the atonement in its proper latitude, find no room for the works of the law, or any pious exertion on the part of the elect. Their reasoning is plausible, and, on the principles of Calvinists, it is no wonder they should deem it irresistible. As the sacrifice of Christ was *infinite* in its nature, he being the only true God, so its effects must be *infinite* in taking away the sins of the elect, for whom alone

* It will be perceived, that I allude here to such Universalists, as have been inclined to calvinistic views. This class formerly made a large majority of the sect. Many have sprung up of late with a faith essentially different, who look for salvation through Christ, rather from the pardoning mercy and free grace of God, than from any satisfaction to his justice, or substituted sufferings for their sins. The number of this class is probably increasing.

the sacrifice was designed. The consequences are, that "Christ's righteousness is so imputed to the elect, that they, ceasing to be sinners, are as righteous as he was;" that "repentance and confession of sin are not necessary to forgiveness ;" and that the "elect cannot do any thing, which is displeasing to God, or prohibited by the law." Such are the opinions of that portion of Calvinists, who, to preserve consistency in their doctrines, think it important to pursue them to their natural limits.*

The Hopkinsian Calvinists and some others, perhaps, who would not be willing to have any part in the first of these names, do not admit the atonement in the light of a satisfaction to the justice of God, and punishment for the sins of men. Nor do they believe any guilt is imputed to men, for which they deserve punishment, except such as they have been instrumental in contracting ; nor any righteousness simply on account of Christ's sufferings. With them the saving power of the atonement was not confined to the elect ; it was sufficient to take away the sins of the whole world ; and yet, by a sovereign decree of God, none but the elect can be made partakers of its benefits. The atonement itself they suppose to be nothing more, than a public manifestation of God's hatred for sin, and holy regard for his own laws, without which manifestation, God could not, in pardoning

* See Mosheim's account of the followers of Agricola, and of the English Antinomians. *Church Hist.* Vol. iv, p. 321.—Also Hannah Adams's Dictionary, 4th ed. p. 25.

sinners, sufficiently have shown his love of holiness, and respect for his government.*

Another opinion, respecting the extent of the atonement, is, that, as Christ was God, and made an *infinite satisfaction*, he not only expiated, or removed the sins of men, but took away all moral and physical evil, and restored man to his primitive perfection and happiness before the fall. This scheme pursues the doctrine of atonement some degrees farther, than either that of the Antinomians, or the Universalists; it will, nevertheless, be difficult to show wherein it is not consistent. The same arguments by which it can be proved, that the sufferings and death of an Almighty Being will take away any kind of evil, will equally prove, that they must take away all evil of every kind and degree.†

* Triangle, First Series, No. viii.

† This plan of extending the effects of the atonement has found its ablest advocate, perhaps, in the learned Dr. Worthington. His views are summed up in the following words.

“The redemption of mankind by Jesus Christ is a deliverance from the evils of the fall, and a reinstating them in the same circumstances and situation they were in before they fell.—

“My persuasion is, that our redemption by Christ will, when it has its perfect work, be productive of all these great and happy effects; that the human nature shall, before the end of the gospel age, and the consummation of all things, be delivered from sin, sorrow, and sickness, and all the other miseries and evils of this life, proceeding from the fall of our first parents, and in the end, from death itself; without tasting of which, it shall be translated from an earthly paradise which it shall once more enjoy, to a heavenly one, which it shall enjoy for ever. And moreover, that all the disorders of nature in general shall be rectified, and that there shall be a redemption of the whole creation to its first state, as well as of man, the lord of it.” *Essay on Man’s Redemption*, p. 253.

Among Calvinists a difference of opinion prevails, or has prevailed, respecting the particular sufferings of Christ, which are to be accounted satisfactory. Some conceive those sufferings only to be efficacious, or to have any bearing on our redemption, which Christ endured in the space of the three hours of solar darkness, while he was hanging on the cross. Witsius took up the argument against this doctrine in reply to a writer, whom he calls a very learned man. Witsius declared it to be the faith of his church, and of himself, that the sufferings of Christ during the whole course of his life, both in soul and body, constituted his satisfaction.*

The Arminians believe the effects of the atonement to be universal; but it removes no sin, except as it *puts men into a capacity* to escape from the evils of sin by opening the door of pardon to all, who will comply with the conditions of the Gospel, namely, faith, repentance, and a holy obedience to the laws of Christ. God has not by any decree of election or reprobation excluded a single individual from embracing these conditions. The terms of salvation are offered to all, and every one is free to receive or neglect them. The notion, that the sufferings of Christ were substituted for the punishment of sinners, and that his righteousness is imputed to them, is rejected by the Arminians. Limborch speaks of Christ having reconciled us to God, and having suffered the severest affliction on our account,

* Economy of the Covenants, p. 293—327.

and averted the punishment, which, as sinners, we deserve ; but, at the same time, he refuses assent to the doctrine of satisfaction, as having no proof in scripture.* Arminius himself seems to have considered the death of Christ as in some way affecting the justice of God, for he says, that, although the mercy of the Deity always inclined him to forgive sins, yet his justice interposed, till by the exercise of his mercy he gave Christ to suffer and die. In this way a reconciliation was accomplished, and all men may enjoy its benefits, who will accept the conditions of pardon. That the faith of Arminians generally has ever corresponded in this particular with the opinion of their leader, is not so clear. In regard to the *nature* of the atonement, the Arminians and Hopkinsians seem not to differ. As to its *benefits*, the former make them applicable to all men ; while the latter suppose them actually restricted to the elect, although they are sufficient to take away the sins of the whole world.

The articles of the English Church are ambiguous in what relates to atonement, as appears from their being received and defended with equal pertinacity by persons entertaining every variety of opinion. These articles declare, that “ We are accounted righteous before God, only for the merit of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, by faith, and not for our own works and deservings.”† Were these words

* Theolog. Christ. Lib. iii, Cap. 21, § 6; et Cap. 22, § 1.

† Article XI, on the Justification of Man.

taken in their literal sense, without comment, few persons, probably, would suspect, that they express any other than the calvinistic views of atonement; but many able and learned expositors of the articles assure us, that no such meaning can be deduced from them. In short, Arminians read them one way, and Calvinists another.

In the prayer of consecration, in the Communion Service, it is said, that Christ was "given to suffer death upon the cross for our redemption, and made there, by his own oblation of himself once offered, a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction, for the sins of the whole world." This passage is calvinistic in clearly admitting the doctrine of satisfaction. It is equally to the purpose of Arminians, Universalists, and Hopkinsians, by allowing the death of Christ to be a sufficient atonement for the sins of the *whole world*. The Hopkinsians may say, that this article admits the provision to be ample, and does not oppose their notion of the elect only being suffered to enjoy it; the Universalists may apply it in its fullest latitude, as signifying, that all men must be saved by an atonement, which is sufficient for all; and the Arminians may restrict its application to such as choose to partake of the benefits thus procured, by accepting the terms of the Gospel. Hence, to whatever sect a man may belong, he can find in the articles and formularies of this church a happy accommodation to his opinions. This is a thing of no consequence, however, at present, any

farther, than it indicates the great variety of opinions in the Church of England on atonement.*

No authority is referred to by the orthodox, whenever atonement is brought into discussion, more frequently, or with more confidence, than Bishop Magee. All parties look up to him, as the champion of their cause. But, whoever will read the Bishop's book, and compare his account of this doctrine with the views usually exhibited by any sect calling itself orthodox, will discover no more than a very general resemblance between them. He says, "The sacrifice of Christ was never deemed by any, who did not wish to calumniate the doctrine of the atonement, to have made God placable, but merely viewed as a means appointed by divine wisdom, by which to bestow forgiveness."† This is the basis of his plan, and you have only to recur to some of the pages of my last letter to be convinced, that it differs in no essential feature from the views of many Unitarians. Nay, I have never heard of an individual Unitarian, who did not maintain what the Bishop says again, that the death of Christ "was the *means*, whereby God has thought fit to grant his favour and gracious aid to repentant sinners, and to fulfil that merciful intention, which he had at all times entertained towards his fallen creatures." No language could better express the general faith of Unitarians.

They differ, as we have seen, in regard to the *man-*

* See Bishop Tomline's Refutation of Calvinism, Chap. iv.

† First Discourse on the Atonement, p. 28.

ner in which these means operate ; and the Bishop, so far from explaining this point, confesses his ignorance, and tells us plainly, that “ he does not know, nor does it concern him to know.” He talks of sacrifice, atonement, propitiation, expiation, but he nowhere explains what he means by them ; and, as for a vicarious punishment, a satisfaction to divine justice, an appeasing of the wrath of God, the sufferings of a substitute, and imputed righteousness and sin, he denies the whole. He calls that “ an idle charge, made against the doctrine of atonement, of supposing a real substitution in the room of the offender, and a literal translation of his guilt and punishment to the immolated victim ; a thing utterly incomprehensible, as neither *guilt* nor *punishment* can be conceived, but with reference to *consciousness*, which cannot be transferred.”* The Bishop here furnishes one of the strongest arguments against the popular doctrine of atonement. Whoever, indeed, will examine his two Discourses, with the purpose of drawing out the entire force of his meaning from the mist of ambiguous words which hangs around it, will be surprised, that he should give vent to so many bitter feelings, and expend so immense a stock of labour, in battering down a heresy of Unitarianism, which stands on the same ground, and presents nearly the same aspect, as the edifice of his own faith.†

* Dissertations, No. xxxviii.

† Dr. Magee does not allow, that the satisfaction of Christ was necessary in the nature of things. “ That men *could* not have been forgiven,” he says, “ unless Christ had suffered to purchase their forgiveness, is no part of the doc-

I have thus brought forward in this, and in the preceding letter, such of the opinions prevailing among Christians, on the subject under discussion, as my limits would permit, and as my object requires. They are placed, it is hoped, in a clear and intelligible light. It will be observed, that the word *atonement* has every where been used in its broad and true sense, denoting a reconciliation between God and man, produced in some way by the life, sufferings, and death of Jesus Christ. In this general sense, it applies to all the opinions which have been mentioned, for they all point to this end. It has lately been made technical and arbitrary, and forced into a different service by every individual, inasmuch as every one employs it to express his own peculiar sentiments.

All profess to believe in the atonement, but when you look at the respective combination of images and impressions, to which each affixes the term, they pre-

trine of the atonement, as held by the Church of England." *Dissert.*, No. xvii. Respecting the Church of England, it has already been shown, that its members take an unlimited latitude in the terms of their faith; and all profess to be guided by the strict letter of the Church. Dr. Magee, therefore, has no authority to lay down a general proposition of this nature, as applicable to the Church at large.

It is moreover, certain, that this position is not true, as it relates to the popular doctrine of atonement by satisfaction. The advocates for this doctrine universally argue, that it arises from a *necessity in the very nature or attributes of God*. Witsius, in discussing this point against the Arminians, in his chapter on the *Necessity of Christ's Satisfaction*, although he waves any consideration of the absolute power of God, maintains, that his justice, wisdom, and holiness, impose upon him the *necessity* of requiring such a satisfaction, as that supposed to be rendered by Christ. In his language, the reason why God chose to save "elect sinners, by the satisfaction of his Son, was because, in his wisdom, he saw *no other way*, by which satisfaction *could be made* to his holiness and justice." *Economy of the Covenants*, p. 349.

sent themselves in every imaginable variety of form and dimensions. A Calvinist, in using the word, thinks of one thing, an Arminian of another, a Hopkinsian of another, and so round the whole circle. We hence perceive the necessity of penetrating deeper than the sound of the word, before we can form any accurate judgment of the opinions of those by whom it is used. For this reason, I have thought proper not to inquire into the meaning of the word in all its arbitrary senses, as it has come under notice, but to let this appear from the ideas, or things, which it was shown to represent.*

That the opinions above enumerated, as being held by persons calling themselves orthodox, may be presented in a narrower compass, they are here exhibited in a brief recapitulation.

Concerning the NATURE of atonement, it is represented, *First*, that Christ, by his sufferings and death, appeased the wrath, and satisfied the justice of God, and with the price of his blood reconciled the Deity to his offending creatures, by paying the immense debt in which their guilt had involved them. *Secondly*, the death of Christ was a punishment, which he endured by literally taking on himself the sins of the whole world, and suffering as a substitute for sinners, or in their place, the full amount of pain, which

* The word, *to atone*, in its primitive sense, signifies to produce an agreement, or reconciliation between parties. *Atonement* denotes this agreement, or reconciliation. It is once only found in the New Testament, Rom. v. 11, where it is a translation of the word *καταλλαγή*, whose literal meaning is *reconciliation*. This Greek word is found four times in the New Testament, and in every other instance is rendered *reconciliation*. Rom. xi. 15; 2 Cor. v. 18, 19.

their sins deserve. *Thirdly*, the atonement consists in the public exhibition of God's hatred of sin, love of holiness, and respect for his government, which was made in the death of Christ. *Fourthly*, it was a *means*, which God chose to employ in bringing sinners into such a state of freedom from guilt as would permit him, consistently with his justice and holiness, to extend to them pardon, and the blessings of salvation.

Again, as to the **EXTENT**, or **EFFECTS**, of atonement, we are told, *First*, that the sufferings of Christ were sufficient only for an elect number. *Secondly*, they were competent to take away the sins of the world, but by a decree of God the elect only can be partakers of their benefits. *Thirdly*, they are not only sufficient for all, but on certain conditions, with which every one can comply, they may be made effectual to all. *Fourthly*, they were expressly designed to be extended to the whole human race, to deliver all men from the evil of sin, and procure a universal salvation. *Fifthly*, the authority of the law is so completely annulled by the death of Christ, that repentance is not necessary for the elect, nor can they do any thing displeasing to God. *Sixthly*, the death of Christ removes all physical, as well as moral evil, and restores man to the condition of holiness and felicity, which he enjoyed before the fall.

And again, as to the **MANNER** in which the objects of atonement are attained, it is said, *First*, that those sufferings only were efficacious, which Christ underwent during the three hours of darkness, while he

hung on the cross. *Secondly*, all his sufferings in the flesh are taken into the account. *Thirdly*, it was necessary for him to endure for a time the torments of wicked spirits in hell. *Fourthly*, his death would have availed nothing, unless he had been condemned as a criminal in a court of justice.

From the above analysis, it is not to be inferred, that all these distinctions are incompatible with each other. Some are contradictory, some are divided by broad lines, while others assimilate so closely, as to allow the same person to bring them both within the enclosure of his creed. The slightest inspection will show, that the differences, on the whole, are extremely great, much greater than with Unitarians. And amongst all these, where shall we find that true faith, that *singleness of belief*, which is essential to salvation? Which of these schemes is the one entitled to the dignity of being a component part in the *essence of christianity*? Till this be fairly settled, and sanctioned by all the orthodox, why is any person to be condemned for not presuming to select and acknowledge it, as a fundamental article? Why should he resign what he believes to be scripture truth, derived from a serious and careful study of the word of God, for this labyrinth of uncertainty? Let him rather rest his hopes on a safer foundation by keeping to his Bible, and praying the Father of mercies for the aid of his holy Spirit to enlighten him with a knowledge of truth, and strengthen him in the practice of holiness.

All the varieties of opinion to which our attention has been directed, both of Unitarians and Trinitarians, as far as they relate to the specific effects of the death of Christ, may be arranged in two general classes.

The *first class* embraces those views, according to which his death is regarded as a means by which the guilt of sin is removed, and God is induced to pardon offenders, and bestow upon them the gift of eternal life. Whatever may have been the extent of the influence of Christ's death, or however this influence may in the wisdom of God have been applied, it is supposed to have operated only in calling into exercise the mercy and love of God, or rather in putting sinners into such a condition, that God may grant them his pardoning mercy and acceptance, without any violation of his justice and holiness. Within this class may be ranked all Unitarians, and a large portion of Trinitarians, both of whom go upon essentially the same principles, and are aiming at the same object, although they may be conducted in different directions.

The *second class* embraces those persons, who look for the efficacy of Christ's death in the satisfaction it has made to divine justice, in its power to appease the wrath of God, and in its value as a sacrifice to the Deity, without which he could not pardon or save his creatures ; and those, also, who believe Christ to have suffered by way of punishment, as a substitute for the elect, and to have purchased for them the forgiveness of sin and a title to salvation by

becoming their surety, releasing them from the obligations of the law, and discharging their debt of obedience. This scheme is called the doctrine of satisfaction, and sometimes the popular doctrine of atonement. It is chiefly, if not entirely, confined to Calvinists. It is universally rejected by Unitarians, as being, in their opinion, opposed to the Scriptures, irrational in itself, derogatory to the character of God, and pernicious in its influence.

To this doctrine my future remarks will be confined, with particular reference to its *reasonableness* and *moral tendency*.

LETTER VI.

On the popular Doctrine of Atonement, as affecting the Character of God.

SIR,

In my two last letters, I have endeavoured to bring together some of the opinions, which christians of various denominations have entertained, concerning atonement by the death of Christ. I have attempted to simplify the subject, and compress its numerous branches within as small a space as possible. This is not the only topic in religion, it is acknowledged, about which much time has been idly expended, unmeaning words profusely multiplied, and

elaborate works composed, without communicating light or profit to the reader ; yet the facts collected in my two last letters abundantly prove, that no speculations or discussions have been less fruitful of truth and sound knowledge, than those relating to atonement.

We arrived at the conclusion, however, that notwithstanding many important minor differences, all the opinions, which have come to light, may be classed in two general divisions. The *first division* comprises those persons, who refer pardon and divine acceptance exclusively to the free mercy and love of God, and look upon the death of Christ as a means, by which God is induced to forgive past transgressions, and sinners are qualified, by accepting certain conditions, for enjoying the blessed gifts of salvation. The *second division* takes in all those, who regard the death of Christ as a bloody sacrifice to satisfy the justice, and appease the wrath of God, and thus to purchase for transgressors the divine forgiveness, and eternal life.

To this latter scheme our attention will now be turned ; and that we may have its several parts distinctly before us, it will not be amiss to commence with the following delineation of its features.

It gives us to understand, that God created man innocent, but left him exposed to evil, with the power of choosing or avoiding it ; man sinned, and thus committed such an offence against the justice of God, as no effort of his own could either eradicate or diminish ; God was wrathful and implacable to

such a degree, that he could not be appeased, nor allow his mercy to extend to his creatures, till his justice was fully satisfied by the sufferings and punishment of an innocent being. That all men might not perish forever, Christ, the Son of God, who was also God, voluntarily offered to endure the full amount of suffering required to quell the anger of the Father, and reconcile him to his creatures; this offer the Father accepted, and in compliance with the contract thus made, the sins of men were imputed to Christ, or he took them upon him in such a way, that their guilt became his own; in this condition, he suffered as guilty of the sins of the whole world, although it was impossible for him to commit a single sin. As Christ has performed his part of the contract, and paid the debt of sinners, he may justly demand the fulfilment of the Father's promise, and claim the blessings of salvation for all whose merited punishment he has endured.

Such are some of the outlines of the doctrine commonly called the *doctrine of satisfaction*, or the popular doctrine of atonement. It is no part of my present undertaking to confute this tenet, nor to oppose the arguments by which it is supported. In this letter I shall attempt nothing more, than a few remarks on the principles which it involves, with the special purpose of ascertaining in what manner these affect the character of God, and how far they have a purifying and practical influence in promoting piety, devotion, and the various duties to our Maker. Unless I am greatly deceived, the doctrine in these

important respects is not only deficient, but fraught with much positive evil.

Let us begin with the first principle of the whole system, which relates to the *nature of the divine justice*. It is assumed as an established position, that the justice of God is rigid, unyielding, and relentless, having an absolute control over mercy, goodness, and every other moral attribute, and refusing the pardon of any sin, till a full measure of punishment has been inflicted. This position is radically erroneous. Justice gives the right to punish, but it does not impose an obligation to exercise this right. As God has an undoubted right, it would always be just for him to punish transgressors; but it does not hence follow, that he is obliged to do it. Whenever God punishes sin, it must be for some end; and if this end can be answered in any other way, his justice does not require punishment. If he chooses, for instance, to pardon sinners on certain conditions, or unconditionally, he may do it without any violation of his justice. He may certainly do as he will with his own. It is perfectly consistent with all his attributes, that he should propose such conditions, as in his wisdom and goodness he may deem sufficient to promote the ends of his government. When the conditions on the part of the sinner are complied with, the veracity and the justice of God are pledged to make good his promises.*

* President Edwards says, that when Christ died, "*all was finished* that was required, in order to satisfy the threatenings of the law, and all that was necessary, in order to satisfy divine justice. Then the *utmost that vindictive*

Justice is of two kinds, and these are confounded together in the scheme of satisfaction. In one sense, justice gives the power, or right of doing a thing ; and in the other, it requires a thing to be done. If a man has injured you, it is just that you should exact reparation ; nevertheless, if you are disposed to forgive the injury, or to pass it over without any consideration, justice does not oblige you to make such a demand. But if you have injured another person, justice calls on you for a full reparation ; you can claim no right or privilege by which you can be absolved, unless you are forgiven by the injured party. In other words, justice obliges every man to render to another his strict due, but does not compel him to claim all his own. Hence, God may pardon the sins of his creatures upon any terms, which he thinks proper, without exacting satisfaction to his justice.*

justice demanded, even the whole debt was paid.” History of Redemption, p. 198.

This writer makes the following distinction between the *satisfaction* and the *merits* of Christ. “ All is done,” he observes, “ by the price that Christ lays down. But the price that Christ laid down does two things. It pays our debt, and so it *satisfies* ; by its intrinsic value, and by the agreement between the Father and the Son, it procures a title to us for happiness, and so it *merits*. The satisfaction of Christ is to free us from misery, and the merit of Christ is to purchase happiness for us.” *Ibid. p. 175.*

This distinction reminds one of the schoolmen. It is evidently a distinction without a difference ; for whoever is *freed from misery*, must in the nature of things enjoy happiness. Hence *satisfaction* and *merit*, as used by President Edwards, do not signify two things, but the same thing.

* In remarking on these distinctions, Emlyn observes, that justice is “either *quod fieri potest*, what lawfully may be done ; or *quod fieri debet*, what ought to be done.” *Works, Vol. ii. p. 49.* Now as it is lawful or right, for God to

If you deny this, you take from God the power to forgive ; for what kind of forgiveness is that, which is granted after the demand of the law is entirely satisfied ? Would you commend a magistrate for his lenity and forgiving temper, who should refuse to release his prisoner, till he had suffered in full measure the penalty of the law ? You could not, it is true, accuse such a magistrate of any wrong, because he has been no more than strictly just ; and it is equally certain, that you could not talk of his forgiveness, for he has forgiven nothing. And on the other hand, forgiveness implies a relinquishment of justice. God cannot be said to forgive a single sin, the penalty of which has been withheld by reason of a satisfaction to his justice, or for any other cause.*

We hence perceive on what a slender support this whole system hangs. Its very first principle is

punish transgressors of his law, it is therefore just ; but this proves no injustice in declining to exercise this right. Justice, in this case, is what *may be done*, but not what, by any necessity, *ought to be done*.

* To preserve consistency in one part, some have been contented to run into extremes and absurd consequences in another. Hence to keep up the notion of the inflexible nature of divine justice, which is the root and branch of the whole system of satisfaction, they frankly and boldly confess, that God does not forgive sin. Mr. Stockell, a most zealous defender of the popular doctrine, says, “In a strict and proper sense, the infinite God *doth not forgive sin*, for it is readily granted by all, who are sound in the faith, that Jesus Christ hath given full satisfaction to divine justice for all sin, and hath fully paid the debt of the church. And if Christ has satisfied the justice of God for all the sins of his people, how then can it justly, or with propriety of speech be said, that God pardoneth our sins and transgressions ? Sure I am, that debt can never be *forgiven*, which is *paid*.” *Redeemer’s Glory Unveiled*, p. 157. See also, *Wright’s Anti-Satisfactionist*, Chap. i.

assumed, incapable of demonstration, and opposed to the divine nature. It makes God a severe, inflexible judge, who is obliged and disposed to exact entire satisfaction from his creatures, before he will show them mercy. If we were arguing the subject, we might say without hesitation, that this simple view of the nature of justice were sufficient to place this doctrine on a ground perfectly untenable. At present, it is enough to infer, that a system, which is held together by a principle so radically and obviously erroneous, and which takes from God the power of granting mercy and forgiveness to his creatures on such terms as he may choose, cannot be expected to have any special efficacy in giving us just conceptions of the divine attributes, or inspiring us with that respect and reverence, which are due to a perfectly holy, wise, and benevolent God.

As to the *anger*, or *wrath* of God, which Calvinists usually connect with their view of the divine justice, it seems unreasonable to presume so much on the common sense and good feelings of mankind, as to inquire what is contained in such a representation, which can cause us to love God, or to magnify and revere his moral perfections. An angry being of infinite power, who seeks to inflict his vengeance on the feeble creatures of his own workmanship, is most certainly not a being, who can be regarded with much depth of love, or warmth of piety, or purity of devotion, by the creatures themselves, whom he is ready to destroy with the devouring flames of his anger. And especially, if with this doctrine you connect to-

tal depravity, which is an equally important link in the calvinistic chain, it would seem absolutely impossible, that any love, or gratitude, or any other good affection can find a place in the breast of man.

How can you love a being, who has all power over you, and who is not only angry with you, and refuses to show any mercy till a full satisfaction be made to his justice, but who has created you with such a nature, as to render it impossible for you to avoid breaking his laws, and incurring his displeasure? Add still further, that he will not be satisfied by any returns you can make, or any sufferings you can endure. As you are not able in your finite nature to answer the demands of his insatiable justice, he seizes upon an innocent victim, on whom he pours out all the vials of his wrath. He then professes himself appeased, and hesitates no longer to open the arms of his mercy. Such is the character, which the doctrine of satisfaction finds in the Deity; and, let me ask you, what is here to indicate the loving kindness, compassion, goodness, long suffering, forbearance, readiness to forgive, and perfect holiness, which our Saviour has taught us to reverence in the everliving God, and which alone can be the object of a pure love, pious gratitude, and ardent devotion? If God were the angry, vindictive being, represented in this system, it would be impossible to love, and impious to adore him.

Another sustaining principle of this doctrine is the *imputation of sin and righteousness*. Christ is said to have taken upon him the sins of men, and they are

saved by receiving his righteousness. This notion is as ill founded, as that concerning justice. Sin is a transgression of a law by an intelligent, moral agent, and it pertains to him alone, who commits the transgression. Guilt is the consciousness of having transgressed. Neither of these things can be transferred ; you cannot be conscious for another, nor can you sin, or be guilty for another. If then, neither the deed, nor the guilt of the deed, can come upon you, how can you suffer the penalty ? The same thing holds on the other side ; righteousness consists in obedience to the law of right, and innocence is a consciousness of this obedience. As one being can neither act, nor be conscious for another, so the righteousness of one being cannot be the righteousness of another. This is irresistible in the nature of things, and God has expressly asserted it by the mouth of the prophet. “The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him.” Until this declaration can be proved false, the imputation either of sin, or of righteousness, must be deemed a fiction.

But let this inconsistency be passed over, and take it for granted, that the notion of imputed sin is true, as set forth in the scheme of satisfaction. In what light does it exhibit the character of God ? Where is the justice, to say nothing of the goodness and mercy, in making the innocent suffer for the guilty ? Could any but a cruel, capricious, tyrannical being resort to such an expedient for repairing the breach of his law ? While God has all power in his hands,

and can employ such means as he pleases to reform and restore his offending creatures, does it argue any thing in his character, which can engage our devout affection or reverence, to inflict upon the innocent a punishment, which was due to the guilty ? Can you imagine a single moral or religious purpose to be answered by such a doctrine, even if it were not inconsistent with the nature of righteousness and sin, and opposed to the divine perfections ? Henry Taylor has said with great propriety ; “ What good can accrue from punishing the *wrong* person rather than the *right*, the *innocent* instead of the *guilty*, does not appear very clear ; nor does it appear, that any thanks are due from me to a judge, who forgives me a sin, that I did not commit.”* Since the transferring of guilt and righteousness is impossible, God is made by the doctrine of satisfaction a justifier of the wicked, which is an impeachment of his holiness. The sinner is no less wicked because another person has suffered ; and if God justifies him simply on account of such suffering, he justifies him while in his wickedness.

Again, this doctrine of satisfaction involves another false principle, and represents God as unjust in requiring the sufferings of Christ as a *punishment*. That Christ suffered for sinners, no christian has ever de-

* Ben Mordecai’s Apology, Vol. ii. p. 771.

For several illustrations of the pernicious tendency of this doctrine of imputative righteousness and sin, see William Penn’s enumeration of what he calls its “ Consequences irreligious and irrational.” Works, 3d. edit. Vol. i. p. 41, 52.

nied nor even doubted. He might suffer by his own consent from motives of benevolence, or for the sake of a reward, or for any other reason. Suffering by no means implies punishment. A man may suffer, who loses a limb, or meets with any other misfortune by accident, which distresses him in his temporal concerns ; he may suffer with the expectation of a recompense, or the hope of communicating relief and comfort to his fellow-men ; yet no *punishment* will be connected with these sufferings. The line of distinction is plainly marked ; no suffering is a punishment, which is not caused by some moral defect, or guilt. Punishment is the suffering of a person, who is conscious of guilt, or of an evil intention ; and no suffering is punishment without this consciousness on the part of the sufferer. As Christ was a holy person, free from sin and guilt, it is evident he could not be punished, however much he might suffer.

If you choose to preserve consistency, and uphold the doctrine of satisfaction at all hazards, you must still insist, that Christ was *punished*, for punishment only could satisfy justice. To what results shall we then be brought ? Christ could not be punished as a holy, sinless being, but only as a guilty and wicked transgressor. In other words, if the doctrine of satisfaction be true, Christ was a sinner. This was avowed by Luther in his usually plain and bold manner, as we have seen in a former letter. He says, that "Christ according to the law, ought to be hanged, for he sustained the person of a sinner, and of a

thief, not of one, but of all sinners and thieves.”* Calvin also tells us, that he died as a *malefactor*. Now as no person can be a sinner, or a malefactor, who has not contracted guilt, Christ must have been guilty of sin. To talk of imputed guilt in this case is to use words without meaning; or if you suppose them to have a meaning, and to signify, that Christ was sinful only as God made him such, you remove no difficulty, but rather add new ones. You resort to an impossibility, despoil God of his justice, and represent him as cruelly inflicting sufferings on the innocent, which none but the guilty deserve.

Some writers, startled at the thought of running to such a length, have tried to reconcile these glaring absurdities. Dr. Clarke and Bishop Stillingfleet were among this number. They were shocked at the idea, that God should punish the innocent for the guilty; and to lessen the embarrassment, Dr. Clarke imagined, that it was no violation of justice in God to *permit* Christ to suffer. Bishop Stillingfleet’s notion was nearly the same, but he explains it in a different manner, by saying, that Christ might *oblige himself* to suffer. These views of two great men only add new weight to the difficulty, with which the whole scheme

* Comment. on Gal. iii. 13. It ought to be observed, however, that Luther did not consider Christ a sinner, because he had *committed* any sin, but because the sins of the world were laid upon him. He affirms, nevertheless, that “whatsoever sins I, thou, and we, all have done, or shall do hereafter, they are Christ’s own sins, as verily as if he himself had done them.” It ought also to be remembered, that Luther is here arguing the point against those whom he calls “the popish sophisters,” and whom he believed to have an overweening attachment to the doctrine of works, and to place an undue value on their own merits.

is encumbered ; for whatever the Deity might permit, and whatever the Saviour might oblige himself to do, the case is not altered in regard to the nature of sin, guilt, righteousness, and innocence ; these remain as really as before personal qualities, which cannot be transferred from one to another. Whoever will escape these embarrassments, unravel inconsistencies, and build up a system honourable to God and conducive to piety, will do well to keep more closely to the Scriptures, and believe Christ to have “endured the cross for the joy that was set before him,” and to have “suffered for sins, the just for the unjust ;” not as a wicked person, but as righteous.* Such is the language of the New Testament, which nowhere intimates, that Christ was punished for us, but that he suffered.

In this labyrinth of contradictions and false principles, where are the *free grace* and *mercy* of God ? The Scriptures inculcate repeatedly, that men are saved by the grace of God, that is, by his free and unmerited pardon of their sins. But the doctrine of satisfaction insists, that no such pardon could be granted, and no sinner could be saved, till Christ, in consequence of a covenant, contract, or bargain, paid a full equivalent for sin. Flavel says, “God stood upon full satisfaction, and would not remit one sin without it.” Where then, let the question be repeated, is the free grace of God ? The debt of sinners is discharged, their redemption is purchased, and

* Heb. xii. 3. 1 Peter, iii. 18.

now salvation is their due by the conditions of the covenant. God has not released them by freely granting pardon as a gift; he has received an equivalent for every thing. Do you reply, that his free grace consists in his having entered into this covenant, and accepted this equivalent, which he was under no obligation to do? Such is the usual explanation, but it is not to the point. By no device or exercise of ingenuity, can it be made out, that any thing is freely given to a debtor, from whom the whole debt, or a full equivalent has been exacted; nor is it of any consequence in what form, or by what process, the discharge has been made. Hence the scheme of satisfaction divests the Deity of his free grace, or his disposition freely to pardon sin.

The same is true in respect to the *divine mercy*. The exercise of this attribute always implies a relinquishment of justice. If, then, justice exacts a rigorous satisfaction, no place is left for mercy. In the scheme of salvation, which we are now considering, mercy is out of sight, and takes no part. Flavel says again, "To the wrath of an infinite God without mixture, to the very torments of hell, was Christ delivered, and that by the hand of his Father;" and Calvin talks nearly in the same language. Who will say that he perceives any thing of mercy here? Do you call the judge merciful, who pursues a criminal with relentless vengeance, till he has executed on him the utmost rigour of the law? In this light is the Deity represented by this doctrine; and if you quench the burnings of his anger, you will not even then have

space for a single beam of mercy; nothing will remain but stern justice refusing to be satisfied, till its severest requisitions are fulfilled.

Such are some of the false principles, which this doctrine embraces, such its inconsistencies, and such the unscriptural and irrational views, which it exhibits of the character of God and his dealings with men. Every reflecting mind must at once perceive the pernicious influence of such dishonourable views of our Maker on the duties of piety and worship.

The Scriptures, and our understanding, command us to look up to God, as a Being of infinite mercy, love, and kindness, who remembers that we are dust, pardons us freely, accepts us graciously, and is more ready to forgive, than we are to repent and forsake our sins. These are the traits of his character, which are calculated more than any others, to enlist all our better principles, our pious sympathy, and warm affections, in his service. Take away his pardoning mercy, and his unpurchased forgiveness, and you obscure the brightness of his glory, you limit the extent of his love, and leave nothing to which dependent, helpless sinners can look up with confidence, gratitude, and heartfelt devotion. Where is the sinner's consolation, or his encouragement to worship God with an unwavering trust in his merciful pardon of the penitent, if he is convinced that his Maker has put the power of pardon out of his hands, and shut up the fountains of his mercy? Let every person act upon this conviction, in conformity with the strict letter and spirit of the doctrine of satisfaction, and

there could be no such thing as pure devotion, humble resignation, firm reliance on the divine goodness, and a holy gratitude for the rich blessings of unmerited mercy. The heart would be left cold and desolate, and the terrors of an angry God would freeze up all the channels of pious thought, and devout adoration.

To avoid this catastrophe, it has been usual to paint before our eyes in glowing colours, the *merits of the Saviour*, and to admonish us of the love and gratitude, which we owe to him for the sufferings he endured, and the debt he has paid. That is, in plain language, the Supreme God is to be robbed of the glory and praise due to his noblest and most lovely attributes, and these are to be transferred to another being, who has consented to take upon him the sins of men, and to shield them from the bolt of divine wrath, which was prepared to be hurled at their defenceless heads. What is this but to exalt the Saviour above the Creator, and to exhibit the character of the Saviour in vastly the most attractive light ? It has been only through his benevolence, mercy, compassion, and sufferings, that God has consented to save any of his creatures from perdition. What can demonstrate more clearly than these facts, the great practical evil, and irreligious tendency of the scheme of satisfaction ? It effectually annuls all obligation to God ; he abated nothing, he has shown us no favour ; Christ has done all, and deserves all. Can any doctrine tend to enlighten the understanding, or purify the heart, or exalt the sentiments, which describes

the Supreme Being as less merciful and good, less compassionate and tender, less benevolent and kind, than another, who acts by his authority, and submits to his will? Can any doctrine reflect greater indignity on the Almighty Jehovah, the ever watchful Parent, who demands and deserves the undivided homage, love, gratitude, and service of every created being?

When the subject is examined in another bearing, it appears, after all, that no security is left for sinners, although Christ has suffered to satisfy the justice of the Father. Two other beings still remain, according to this system, who are equal with the Father, namely, the Son and Holy Spirit. As each of these beings is God, and has all the attributes of the Father, *the justice of each must be satisfied, and the anger of each appeased.* As far as this scheme has been unfolded, it provides no satisfaction to the justice of any being except God the Father. If Jesus satisfied the Father only, who has satisfied the Son and Holy Spirit? Or if they are not satisfied, where is the sinner's hope? Can the second and third persons of the trinity, who are in all respects equal to the first, can they dispense with the requisitions of justice, and pardon offenders by the simple exercise of free grace? Is the justice of the Son less perfect, or less rigid, than that of the Father? If so, he is not equal with the Father. Is it affirmed, that his justice needed no satisfaction? The same may then be affirmed of the Father, and the ground-work of the whole system will be destroyed.

No mode of escaping this dilemma can be devised, which shall keep up the doctrine of satisfaction, but to say, that Christ satisfied himself; and in regard to moral influence, this will carry us some degrees beyond the point, at which we arrived before. We then found that the generous sacrifice of Jesus, in voluntarily suffering to quell the rage of God, and conciliate his favour towards his creatures, represented him as an object vastly more worthy of our love and gratitude, than the Father of all things. When to this you add the willingness of the Son to give up his own claims, to relax the rigour of his justice, and to receive penitent sinners as a kind benefactor, and affectionate friend, without turning upon them the countenance of anger, or requiring satisfaction, you present him in a still loftier attitude of excellence and loveliness. The glory of the Father is totally eclipsed behind the blazing lustre of the Son. The God, whom all are taught to adore and worship as infinitely the greatest and best of beings, is represented to us as a stern tyrant, actuated by some of the worst passions of men, and possessing no other virtue than vindictive justice. Who could be so unwise, as to trust themselves in the hands of such a being, whilst there is another so much more compassionate, and merciful, and good, who pardons freely, and has made such sacrifices to demonstrate his love, and purchase their salvation?

How different is this representation from the account, which our Saviour himself gives of the cause of his coming into the world. “God so loved the

world," said Jesus, "that he *gave* his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life."* We are here told, that the Son was given to be a Saviour, and that the cause of his being given was the *love* of God; but the doctrine of satisfaction inculcates the idea, that the justice and the anger of God were the original cause of the Saviour's coming; and so far from his being given by the Father, he is described as giving himself to be a sacrifice for the sins of men, and to purchase their redemption by paying the whole debt. Yet the Scriptures would have us understand, that salvation is the *gift* of God, the gift of his love and mercy communicated through Jesus Christ, whom he *sent* to be a Redeemer and Saviour.

Not that Christ did not love the world. His whole life was an office of love for the salvation of men; his sufferings were voluntary, and it was by reason of his great love for the world, that he was induced to submit to them. But this love was exercised in doing acts of kindness and mercy, by the aid and strength of God, for a most noble and benevolent purpose. According to this scripture view, we have ample grounds for adoring the majesty and unbounded love of God, and at the same time for rendering a profound reverence and affectionate gratitude to the Saviour, for the part he has acted in doing the Father's will, and opening the door of salvation to a sinful world.

* John, iii. 16.

The *infinite nature of sin* is another feature in the doctrine of satisfaction, which was formerly set forth in a conspicuous light by all sound writers, but which of late seems to be left more in the shade. Many have urged it as a point of vital importance, and affording one of the strongest arguments for the deity of Christ. The whole matter may be compressed into a single syllogism of the simplest form. Sin is an infinite evil. It requires an infinite being to atone for such an evil. Christ atoned for it; therefore, Christ is an infinite being, or God. This no doubt would be very solid and logical, were it not for a solitary defect in the leading term of the syllogism. That sin is an infinite evil is evidently false, and of course the chain of consequences, which was supposed to hang upon this position, falls to the ground. All sin is committed by a finite being; and no such being can commit an infinite act, whether good or bad. Besides, if sin were infinite, every sinful act would be equal in magnitude and crime, which is absurd. Another consequence of this doctrine, and a most serious one, is, that if satisfaction for sin can only be made by an infinite being, *God himself must have suffered for sin*, as he is the only infinite being in the universe. Nor is this consequence imaginary or theoretical; it has been made a theme with indiscreet and overzealous preachers, for magnifying the merits of the Saviour, and enlisting the passions by vivid representations of the intense sufferings, which must have been endured by an Almighty Surety. Is it possible, that any mind can have a just sense of

the holy character of God, or be imbued with the spirit of exalted and rational piety, which can endure a thought so shocking? What devout sentiments and feelings, or what reverence and adoration, can that doctrine awaken, which represents the God of the universe as dwelling upon the earth, suffering the abuses of wicked men, and dying on a cross? Can such a doctrine have any purifying influence? Yet this doctrine must be true, if an infinite being has suffered to satisfy infinite justice, and take away the guilt of infinite sin.*

The doctrine of *election and reprobation* is another, which has lost much ground of late, but which is still retained by every consistent Calvinist, and closely linked in the scheme of satisfaction; so closely indeed, that the efficacy of Christ's death is confined exclusively to the "elect, whom God did from all eternity decree to justify." Witsius has a long argument to prove this tenet, and concludes by saying, that it would be "unworthy of the wisdom, goodness, and justice of God to exact and receive satisfaction from his most beloved Son, for those, whom he neither gave, nor wanted to give to his Son, and whom

* Bishop Magee is very indignant, that Dr. Priestley should charge this doctrine of infinite sin upon the orthodox scheme of atonement. "That *some few* indeed, have argued thus," he remarks, "is *certainly to be admitted and lamented*. But how poorly such men have reasoned, it needed not the acuteness of Dr. Priestley to discover. On their own principle the reply is obvious; that sin being committed by a finite creature, requires only a finite satisfaction, for which purpose a finite person might be an adequate victim."—*Dissert. No. xiii.* But we have already seen, that Dr. Magee's plan of atonement retains no more than a shadow, and a very faint shadow of orthodoxy.

he decreed to consign to everlasting confinement, that they might suffer in their own persons the demerit of their crimes."* Without going into the author's argument, the question would seem here most naturally to arise, that since Christ is God, or, as you have called him, an Almighty Surety, how is it possible, that the infinite satisfaction of such a being should not have taken away all sin? Justice is no more than infinite, and when this is satisfied by an infinite sacrifice, its demands are at an end; if a single sin can be removed by such a sacrifice, all the sins which ever have been, or ever can be committed, must, in the necessity of the case, be equally removed.

But our duty calls us at present to the tendency of this doctrine, as making a branch of the scheme of satisfaction. And in this respect, the case is too plain to need many words. The account of the matter is this. God so formed his creatures originally, that they must become the slaves of sin; for notwithstanding the covenant of works, of which divines say so much and the Scriptures so little, God knew this covenant would be broken. Forseeing this, he resolved, even before the covenant was made, to rescue a certain portion from the penalty of transgression. Hence he entered into another covenant with the Son, by which he agreed to accept his sufferings, for a specified number, and determined, as we are told,

* Economy of the Covenants, p. 359. Chapter on the *Persons for whom Christ engaged and satisfied.*

for "the praise of his glorious justice," to consign the remainder to everlasting torments. And what gives this singular act a still more extraordinary aspect is, that Christ is acknowledged to have been as able and willing to save all, as part, had it thus been the will and the good pleasure of God.

Now in what character does this exhibit our holy and heavenly Father? His justice has been satisfied to its utmost limits, and yet he refuses to let his purchased favour flow to any but a selected number, whom he has arbitrarily chosen, without any regard to their merits or superior claims. Allow that the attributes of God, and all the rich blessings of his providence, loudly call upon us for praise, and reverence, and gratitude; nevertheless, let the question be seriously answered, whether a single trait of his character is here displayed, which does not essentially diminish the force of such a call? Shall they, who are condemned, praise him for plunging them into eternal misery? Is this consistent with human nature? Do we love those, who seek our ruin? Would it not be an insult and mockery to demand of any one in the midst of his sufferings to love and honour the author of his wretchedness?

And again, shall they who are saved praise God for their fortunate rescue? Surely not; it is not to him they are indebted; he has released nothing; he has demanded and received a full satisfaction without mercy or favour; the righteous owe every thing to their Surety, but nothing to their God. Where then is the cause of praise, of devotion, or of any duty

to our Maker? There is none. These reflections must occur to every mind, and need not be dwelt upon. Can any thing be more certain, than the tendency of such a doctrine to destroy all piety, love of God, and devout adoration of the divine majesty, if its pernicious influence were not counteracted by the dictates of the understanding, the authority of the moral sense, and the imposing attributes of the divine nature?

On this topic, as well as many others intimately related to this part of the subject, much more might be said. The above hints will serve to show in what light the doctrine of satisfaction places the character of God, and what must be its natural influence on the devout affections of men, and on all the duties of piety.

LETTER VII.

On the popular Doctrine of Atonement as affecting the practical Virtues.

SIR,

In my previous remarks on atonement, I have taken pains to exhibit this doctrine in some of the numerous forms in which different sects of christians have been accustomed to view it, and to delineate, as accurately as I could, the portraiture, which has been

drawn and recognized by Calvinists. In performing this task, my design has been twofold; first, to show that Unitarians do not deserve the reproach of singularity and rashness, which the orthodox are so fond of bestowing on them for their opinions on this subject, since these opinions correspond in every essential respect with those of a large portion of Trinitarians; and, secondly, to trace the influence of the doctrine of satisfaction, or what is sometimes called the popular doctrine of atonement, as it relates to the duties both of piety and of morality.

The first part of this design has been accomplished, and the second commenced. In my last letter was examined the influence of this doctrine on the duties and exercises of piety and devotion; and I willingly leave it to the impartial reader to decide, whether, in its relation to these objects, it has not been found wanting. It is left to every one to judge, whether a doctrine, which is built on the position, that God created men with a necessary aversion to all good, and inclination to all evil; which teaches, that the God of heaven is an angry, vindictive being, who exacts a rigid obedience from creatures to whom he has given no power to obey; whether a doctrine, which robs the Almighty of his loveliest attributes, by making him insist on a full equivalent, an entire discharge of the debt incurred by transgressors, and which represents him as demanding the sufferings and punishment of an innocent and holy being as a satisfaction to his justice, and a means of appeasing his wrath, before he will extend to them his mercy and

forgiveness; whether a doctrine, which refers our rescue from moral death, and even the possibility of salvation and future glory, to the benevolence and willing sacrifice of this being, who suffered and died, and which thus exalts him in every adorable excellence above the Creator of the universe; a doctrine, which, although it provides an *infinite* satisfaction, leaves God unsatisfied, and represents him as consigning a large portion of his creatures to endless and irremediable perdition, from which they have neither power nor means to escape,—I say, it may be left to the judgment of every fair minded reader, whether such a doctrine is calculated to kindle the holy flame of piety, or of love and affectionate reverence to our Maker. Does it not rather exhibit him in a character, which no good man can respect, and no pious heart can love?

It now remains to consider this doctrine as it affects the character and conduct of men in their *social relations*. What is its power to strengthen the bonds and preserve the harmony of society, to scatter the seeds and cherish the growth of charity? What is its power to promote the love of neighbours and friends, to call out the gentler virtues of sympathy, mercy, gratitude, to subdue the passions and moderate the desires, to teach man forbearance, forgiveness of injuries, a disregard of self, and a disinterested good will towards others? Has the doctrine of satisfaction any sanctifying influence in attaining these ends, or in setting up the standard of good mo-

rals in the lives and hearts of men? To this inquiry I now proceed.

In the first place, it might with safety be laid down as a general position, that a doctrine, *which affords such feeble aids to piety, cannot exert much power in the cause of morality.* It is not to be expected, that a doctrine, which presents so few motives to the love of God, will lend much encouragement to the love of men. Morals and piety spring from the same source. All human virtue, as far as it depends on motives distinct from immediate interest, or immediate happiness, has its foundation in the character of God; or rather, in the views entertained of his character. The conduct of men, who act from reflection and principle, will be such as they conceive to be consistent with the attributes, the dispensations, and the will of the Deity. In the acts of praise and devotion, or in any deeds of piety, they will be moved by the same general causes, as in the duties of morals. The will of God, the love of his excellence, the fear of his displeasure, and the hope of his rewards, will be equally the motives to our prayers and penitence, our praise and gratitude, and to our righteous conduct as members of the social compact. Hence it is, that the doctrine of satisfaction, just in proportion as it weakens the obligation of piety, will destroy the tone of the moral feelings, and diminish the inducements to the practical virtues.

If we go into particulars, we shall find this conclusion supported in its broadest latitude. The religion of Jesus reveals to us a future state of being;

it tells us of rewards for the good, and of punishments for the wicked in that state ; it tells us also, of a preparation for the blessings of the future, which consists in a freedom from sin. “Without holiness no man shall see the Lord.” It is, then, an inquiry of no little moment, how this preparation is to be made. How are we to escape the guilt of sin, and become holy ? What have we to do in this work, and what are our guides ? If we have nothing to do, we may be at ease ; if we have a part to act, it is a concernment of infinite interest to us, that we know what it is, and be not idle. Those who read the Scriptures cannot fail to discover, that we have much to do, and that our duties are of two kinds, as *pertaining to God, and to man.* We have before seen how little aid the doctrine of satisfaction affords to the former ; and it will soon be seen, that it is equally defective in respect to the latter.

No higher model can be presented to our imitation, than the *example* of the Deity ; and to this example we are in many instances referred in the Scriptures. It was the injunction of our Saviour, “Be ye merciful, as your Father also is merciful ;” and again, “Be ye perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect.” In other words, he would have us imitate the example of our heavenly Father, as far as it is possible for us in our present state, as a means of virtue and a preparation for his future service.

Let this rule be applied in one or two particulars only, as for instance, the exercise of *mercy* and *forgiveness*, and see to what conclusions we shall be

brought. From the calvinistic views of atonement, what do we learn respecting the *mercy* of God? We are told, that all men, in transgressing the laws of their Maker, have excited against them his anger, that he exacts a rigorous punishment without regard to the weakness of his creatures, or their proneness to err from indiscretion, ignorance, or precipitancy; and that he shows no symptoms of lenity on account of their originally depraved nature, or the temptations and calamities, which attack and oppress them. No, his demands are imperious, he yields not to compassion, but insists on a full satisfaction, either in the eternal ruin of the offenders, or in the equivalent sufferings of a substitute. The cries of mercy are then heard, that is, when there is no room for mercy, and the unhappy objects of divine wrath are saved from perdition.

Now, suppose this example to be followed among men, and that all, who have the power, should inflict a condign punishment on every transgressor of a human law, unless his redemption were purchased by the tantamount sufferings of another; or suppose every individual to pursue with vengeance every other individual, who, either by accident or any other cause, should encroach upon a civil or private right, and this without any regard to the capacity or circumstances of the transgressor. Such a system of exaction and punishment would be in strict imitation of the example of the Deity, as set forth in the doctrine under discussion. Do you see any thing in it advantageous to the interests of society, or calculated

to ameliorate the condition of men? Do you behold any thing, which can soften the temper, humanize the heart, or draw out the tender and amiable traits of our nature? So far from it, that the very lineaments of mercy are obliterated from the character of God, and must be so from the character of men, if they copy this example.

Turn next to the divine command of *forgiveness*. How does this exalted virtue appear in the conduct of the Almighty towards his creatures? According to the satisfaction scheme, he forgives no one until he has received a full reparation. That is, he forgives nothing, for there can be nothing to forgive after a reparation is made. Notwithstanding it is one of the golden precepts of the religion of Jesus, that men shall forgive their brethren; notwithstanding we are required to ask in our prayers, that our heavenly Father will "forgive our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us;" notwithstanding he has repeatedly declared his long suffering, and his willingness to forgive the sincerely penitent; yet, we are here told, that he will *not* bear with them, will *not* forgive, till they have been punished to the utmost.

Let this example of God be the rule of human conduct. Let men refuse to forgive their brethren an injury, till they have received such a satisfaction as they may justly demand, and pursue all delinquents into the miseries of a prison or of death. It is true, they will do no more than insist on the stern demands of justice, by executing the rigours of the law: but

they will at the same time shut out the light of mercy and forgiveness from the human breast, and banish the numerous train of virtues, which are their constant attendants, and which afford the greatest solace to the pious mind, and the strongest incentives to good morals. Other instances might be adduced to illustrate this part of the subject, but these two are enough.

To obviate these serious consequences, it is said, that the *justice of God is eternal and perfect*, and as such must be satisfied whenever it is violated. This is a false conclusion, for the justice of God is not more eternal and perfect, than the justice of man. Justice is a single quality, and admits of no degrees. Justice is not one thing in God, and another in man ; it is the same in both. Its demands in one case, therefore, are the same as in the other ; and if any argument can be drawn from the nature of justice to prove, that God cannot forgive till all its requirements are answered, the same will hold in respect to men. And, moreover, if man can forgive, while the breach of justice is unrepaired, and God cannot, it will be allowing to men a greater power, than to the Deity himself. In short, if human laws were to be framed, and men to act, in conformity with the conduct of God, described in the system we oppose, the strongest barriers to vice would be broken down, the amiable and noblest virtues would have no space for action, and society, if society there could be, would exhibit little else than a boisterous contest of selfishness, ingratitude, pride, and power.

If there be any one principle in man, which impels him to rectitude of conduct, more forcibly than another, it is a sense of *personal responsibility* and *moral obligation*. This principle cannot exist in the mind of him, who sincerely believes, that an infinite satisfaction has been made for his sins. If a man is convinced, that he is totally depraved, and can do nothing of himself, and that all his evil deeds have been transferred to another, who has atoned for them, or removed their guilt in the sight of God; or, which is the same thing, if he believes another has become responsible for him, and taken upon himself the consequences of his sins, where can be this man's consciousness of personal guilt, or of personal responsibility? Again, if he believes that he has no power of himself to obey the laws of God, and reform his sinful nature, but that he is to be purified, pardoned, and accepted, in consequence of the obedience of another, where is any room left for a sense of moral obligation?

Indeed, if this doctrine of an infinite atonement by an Almighty surety be true, it most effectually nullifies all the *precepts* and *sanctions* of the Scriptures. This is so plain, that it seems hardly to admit of an illustration; for what can be the value of precepts, which cannot be reduced to practice, or of sanctions, which can have no influence on the mind? What is the authority or the use of commands, which cannot be voluntarily obeyed, and even the obedience of which could produce no change in our condition? Why should we repent of sins, which have been im-

puted to another, and can never be laid to our charge. These are not idle questions, nor questions of mere speculation; they have a momentous bearing on all that is practical in the Gospel scheme. Repentance and obedience constitute the substance of the practical part of the Scriptures, and if the foundations of these be unsettled, nothing remains upon which to erect the structure of virtue.

The truth is, that this doctrine carries us back to a state of nature, and resolves all moral duties into *motives of expediency*. Men cannot act with reference to a future state, who believe their future destiny fixed, as all must believe, that hold to the calvinistic notion of atonement. Were their practice to correspond with their faith, private interest would then be the ruling motive to virtue, and men would do good, as far as it should contribute to their immediate benefit, and no farther. They might refrain from some of the heinous offences, which endanger the peace of society, because any disorder in the body politic would necessarily be an infringement on their privileges, and an injury to themselves; but there would be no moral bars to resist the encroachments of power, no sedative influence on the passions, no control to unlicensed ambition, no spur to the generous virtues.

Even the aids, which natural religion affords to practical goodness, could hardly be said to exist; for in natural religion the will of God, as far as it can be understood from the light of reason and conscience, presents a strong motive to a reflecting mind; and

the glimmerings of nature shadow forth a future state with sufficient distinctness, to make this an inducement to act for something more than the present. But the person, who believes in an infinite atonement for sin, and its concomitant doctrines, can never reasonably be influenced by any rules of duty, which proceed from a consideration of the divine will, or which receive their sanctions from a prospect of futurity. For let the will of God be what it may, and let the certainty of a future retribution be demonstrated with ever so much clearness, yet no rational man can act from these motives, while he is sure that his sentence is past, and that he is either condemned as incorrigible, or released from all possible responsibility and danger, by the infinite satisfaction of Christ.

The enjoyment of the present will be all that can concern him, and he will order his life accordingly. All men will seek their happiness; but how few of those who are not guided by the principles of a pure religion, know in what their true happiness consists. A single glance at the conduct of men under present circumstances, is enough to prove how imperfectly they judge, even with the light and sanctions of a divine religion; but when this light becomes darkness, and these sanctions powerless, as they do in the scheme of an infinite atonement, it is easy to conceive how much more difficult it would be to attain just apprehensions of the nature of human virtue and happiness.

Wise men, without doubt, may even then be vir-

tuous to a certain degree, not because they consider it a duty, but because they find virtue more conducive than vice to their present well being. But what will you do with the unwise, lovers of the world and its follies, slaves to their appetites and votaries of pleasure, who are so far deluded as to imagine themselves happy in their iniquities, and so far blinded and debased, as to wish for no higher attainments or better enjoyments than these afford? If you could arouse them to a sense of their moral dignity, you must despair of turning them to a better course by any arguments of persuasion or terror drawn from the doctrine of satisfaction. If you start with the fundamental premises, that their doom is sealed by the decrees of heaven, and that the burden of their sins rests on one, whose redeeming power is infinite, you will search in vain for any arguments, which will touch their hopes or fears, convince their understanding, or descend to their conscience.

Even admitting the Gospel to have authority as containing revealed truths, no possible benefit could be derived from its practical rules. Its "exceeding great and precious promises," of which the Apostle speaks, could afford no encouragement. The promise of pardon to the penitent sinner, of divine assistance to those who ask, and of future rewards to the obedient; these high incitements to practical goodness, these cheering consolations under every trial, these strong inducements to patient submission, would be deprived of their power. Repentance would be nothing, obedience nothing, divine aid unnecessary.

Threatenings could have no terror, commands no authority. For why repent or obey, why be moved by threatenings or commands when you are conscious, that these can have no bearing on your ultimate destiny? Thus it is, that the Scriptures become a useless book in the hands of him, who sees the price of all his sins fully paid in the imputed righteousness of Christ.*

Nor does the evil end here. The consistent believer of this doctrine will hold himself under no obligation to rest satisfied with its mere *negative* influence, which goes only to show him the folly of attempting to do any good. With equal force it will prove to him the *innocency of evil*. Some, indeed, who have ventured to follow their faith whither it

* The following quotation from Hervey, a defender of the satisfaction scheme, contains plain language. "The debt of penal suffering," says he, "and debt of perfect obedience, are FULLY DISCHARGED by our divine surety, so that we are no longer under the necessity of obeying, to obtain an exemption from punishment." See Carpenter's *Unitarianism the Doctrines of the Gospel*, 2nd edit. p. 346.

This is the true state of the case, and an honest acknowledgement. How such a doctrine, even in the partial eyes of its abettors, can be discovered to redound to good morals, is a query whose depth it may well employ their wisdom to fathom.

Calvin comes to the same end, but by a shorter process,—not only by making obedience unnecessary, but by depriving us of the power of obeying. "We are moved from within," he observes, "by no thought to do well. Wherefore, I detest those, who ascribe to us *any freedom of will*, by which we may prepare ourselves to receive the grace of God; or, by which we may of ourselves co-operate with the Holy Spirit, which may be given us." *Calvini Tractatus Theologici*, p. 90; as quoted by Professor Norton in his "Views of Calvinism," in the *Christian Disciple*, vol. iv. p. 250. Whoever would know what Calvinism is, as it has been understood by those, who were considered leaders in this faith, will find its prominent features delineated with great discrimination and judgment in the above article.

naturally leads them, have openly asserted, "That they *cannot* do any thing which is displeasing to God, or prohibited by the law."* In reality, there are no sins, for nothing can be done, which God has not decreed; nor can he condemn evil deeds, for which Christ has made a full atonement. Or, in the technical language of school divinity, "the elect cannot fall from grace." This, to be sure, is a broad principle, but it is radically interwoven with the doctrine; and the scholastic theologues were consistent. Why should it not be acted upon by those who hold to the doctrine, as much as any other principle in religion? To a rational man, with such a faith, it must be considered as good a rule of action as any in the Scriptures; for all actions will be alike to him in the end; that is, he will be responsible for none, and the call of present interest is the only voice of wisdom.

View this presumption of personal assurance of salvation through the electing grace of God, and the infinite merits of Christ, as it relates to *another feature* of the subject, on which its advocates have dwelt with much complacency and apparent delight. Edwards tells us, that "The sight of hell torments will exalt the happiness of the saints forever. It will not only make them more sensible of the greatness and freedom of the grace of God in their happiness; but it will really make their happiness the greater, as it will make them more sensible of their own happiness; it will give them a more lively relish of it; it

* Mosheim's Church History, vol. v. p. 412.

will make them prize it more. When they see others, who were of the same nature, and born under the same circumstances, and they so distinguished, O it will make them sensible how happy they are. A sense of the opposite misery in all cases greatly increases the relish of any joy or pleasure."* Can you imagine any thing more revolting and horrible? It is, nevertheless, a vivid sketch from the picture of Calvinism, if by Calvinism we are to understand the faith of those, who have always been considered leaders of the sect. Bring this notion into human life. If "a sense of the opposite misery will greatly increase the relish of joy" among the saints in heaven, the same ought to follow among good men on earth, especially those who hold themselves to be freed from guilt by the virtue of an atonement. Then they must truly delight in the sufferings of their brethren, and feel a pleasure in adding to their misery. Let me not do so much violence to the understanding and pious feelings of a single reader, as to ask him to point out the practical good tendency of an opinion so monstrous, or of doctrines, with which any power of ingenuity, or any perversion of judgment, could force it into an alliance.

Add farther the doctrine of *infinite sin*. It was observed in a former letter, that the friends of the satisfaction scheme at the present day have not all so clear an insight into the infinite nature of sin as

* Edwards' Sermon on the Eternity of Hell Torments. See *Christian Disciple*, vol. iv. p. 260.

formerly. Some of them have at last discovered it to be an absurdity, although this discovery weakens a very important link in the chain of the trinity, and destroys what was once considered one of the strongest arguments for the supreme deity of Christ. For it would appear, in the nature of things, that if there were not an infinite evil to remove, no good reason could be assigned why the sacrifice of an infinite being should be required. Suppose a believer in the atonement, therefore, who is fond of keeping consistency in his opinions, and with this view still clings to the old faith in the infinitude of sin ; suppose such a one to order his practice according to his belief. His system of ethics will be simple indeed. If all sins are infinite, they are equal in magnitude, and consequently equal in guilt. It is easy to see where a man's morals will end, who strives to keep up a harmony between his conduct and this article of his faith.

Such are some of the evidences, that *the calvinistic doctrine of atonement cannot boast of its purifying influence on the hearts of men, nor of its power to advance the cause of morals in society.* To this series of statements Calvinists will no doubt object, that however plausible in theory, it is nevertheless gratuitous, and unsupported by experience. In part I should cordially accede to the justice of this reply, for it ought to be a source of much joy to know, that Calvinists are better than their principles. In spite of their belief in the absolute wickedness of their nature, and in their inability to do a good thing, we find

among them pious christians and virtuous men. We even find something good among them all, reprobate as well as elect, notwithstanding their faith, that the nonelect are and always must be at enmity against God, and prone to all wickedness. It is agreed, therefore, that the foregoing deductions are not entirely the lessons of experience. Let it be observed, however, that this argues nothing against their accuracy. Because the tendency of the doctrine has been resisted by higher sanctions, and holier motives, than any which this doctrine affords, it is not to be inferred, that no such tendency exists. The *tendency* is the point in question, and to this only have my remarks been directed.

It may again be objected, perhaps, that the process of argument has not been fairly pursued, since a single doctrine has been taken out of the system, and examined without regard to its connexion with all the other parts. To this I answer, that every doctrine in the christian scheme ought to be able to stand by its own merits. Christ has revealed no truth, nor enjoined any rule, which demands the concurrence of all the parts of his religion to support its weight, and preserve its consistency. The attributes of God are immutable; and with these attributes every truth of religion must be in accordance. No injustice, therefore, can be done to any doctrine, in regard to its individual tendency, by examining it alone; but, on the contrary, if it will not bear such an examination, either as taken separately, or as united with kindred doctrines, it leaves a plausible

ground of suspicion, to say the least, that something is defective and wrong.

And, furthermore, Calvinists must prove, that there is such a consistency in their doctrines, that one either must, or can be taken as connected with the others. To none but themselves have they ever succeeded in making such a harmony appear. That men should be totally depraved, and yet be capable of any good; that they should be deprived of power, and yet be required to act; that all their sins should be atoned for, and yet they should be responsible for their conduct; that their destiny should be fixed by an eternal decree, and yet they should be dealt with as having freedom of will, and be made accountable for their actions; these are paradoxes, which neither the great powers and ingenuity of Calvin, nor the acuteness and sophistry of Edwards, have been able to divest of their tremendous clouds of mystery and darkness, so as to be seen clearly by any other rational man than a Calvinist.

When we read in the calvinistic formulary, that "Man, by his fall into a state of sin, *hath WHOLLY lost all ability of will* to any spiritual good accompanying salvation; so as a natural man, being *altogether averse from good*, and dead in sin, is not able by his own strength to convert himself, or *to prepare himself thereunto*;"* when we read such language, can we suppose, that the man who assents to it will come upon us in the next words, with the assertion, that we

* Confession of Faith, Chap. ix. § 3.

have “ability of will,” and that we are *not* so “averse from good,” but that we may obey the commands of God, and discharge the duties of a christian? Will such a man present to us the motives, the promises, threatenings, and rewards of the Gospel? Should a man tie our hands and feet, and then promise us a reward if we would walk, and engage in active service, but threaten us with punishment if we refused, should we think him any thing short of a simpleton or a madman? How then can we discover any unity of parts in the calvinistic doctrines, so much at variance with those principles of the mind, by which alone we perceive consistency in all things else? Or where is the impropriety of discussing the tendency of any one of these doctrines, as distinct from the others, when no connexion or analogy can be traced with any others, which are not as inconsistent and indefensible, as this doctrine itself?

LETTER VIII.

On the practical Tendency of Unitarian Views of Atonement.

SIR,

HAVING considered the influence of the calvinistic theory of atonement on piety and morals, it remains only to make a similar examination of the Unitarian views of this subject. We have seen, that, so far as the *tendency of an opinion* can have any bearing on temper and conduct, no doctrine can be more pernicious, than that which encourages sinners to believe themselves released from the burden of iniquity, and washed from the stains of guilt, by an infinite atonement made to appease the wrath and satisfy the justice of God. We have seen, that no doctrine can have a greater power to debase the character of the Deity, darken his bright perfections, cool the ardour of piety, weaken the inducements to a holy life, inspire a false confidence on the part of the sinner, and generally to sustain the kingdom of evil in the world.

Among all the errors, which have found their way into the christian scheme, and corrupted its original purity, it seems impossible, that any should be more dangerous, or more unworthy of a holy religion, than that which presents so easy a remedy for human guilt. The popish doctrine of indulgences, which

first roused the spirit of Luther, and opened his eyes to the enormities of the Romish Church, was truly considered a destroying principle of all virtue. But what does this doctrine of an infinite satisfaction promise? not a release from one sin, but from all sins. Tetzel could proffer no indulgence, which went beyond the power of the Pope; whereas, the preacher of this doctrine may feel himself secure in going to the full extent of the power of the Deity, for the atonement which he preaches was made by the Deity himself, and possesses an infinite efficacy. Can you imagine any evils flowing from the popish doctrine of indulgences, which would not result in a much greater degree from the notion of an infinite satisfaction for sin, if they were both equally believed and applied to practice? They both remove all personal responsibility, and leave the sinner unconcerned for the past, and regardless of the future.

All christians, as well unitarian as trinitarian, are agreed respecting the necessity of having the guilt of sin removed, before men can be happy in the rewards of future glory. They all agree, that the present condition of man is a sinful one, and that the joys of the blessed can never be known by any, who are not made perfect in holiness. They unite, also, in the belief, that this must be the work of God; for although we may avoid evil, yet no human power can take away the guilt of past sin. Such is the condition of man, and it is not important at present to inquire, how he came into this condition: whether by his own agency alone, or by the constitution of his

nature, or by divine appointment. The only question is, how shall he escape from a just punishment of his guilt, and be saved?

Here again all christians have a common faith. They universally believe *salvation to be through Jesus Christ*. In him they behold a Saviour, whom God has qualified and empowered to be a Mediator between himself and his creatures, and to perform an effectual part in rendering men worthy of divine approbation and forgiveness. Unitarians and Trinitarians believe, that “God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life;” that “we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ;” that “God hath given to us life eternal, and this life is in his Son;” that Jesus has “obtained for us eternal redemption;” and that “in him we have redemption through his blood.”* In short, every christian believes, that sin is taken away, the guilty pardoned, and the penitent saved through Jesus Christ, as expressed in the above texts, and many others in almost every part of the New Testament.

The great point of difference has been respecting the *manner* in which Christ was the author of salvation ; and the very circumstance of this subject having been viewed under such a variety of aspects is enough to prove, that it is a thing of little importance as an article of christian faith. If it were re-

* John iii. 16 ;—Rom. v. 1 ;—1 John v. 11 ;—Heb. ix. 12 ;—Eph. i. 7.

vealed, it would admit of no dispute; if it were essential, it would have been revealed. That Christ was a Saviour sent from God is a revealed truth, and is thus an essential article of faith. If there be any secret purpose, or mysterious efficacy in his doctrines and actions, they have not been made known, and therefore it is not a necessary part of a christian's duty to search them out. That Christ is a Redeemer, and a Saviour, with full power from heaven, is enough for any one to know, who opens his mind to a ready reception of all the doctrines, which he has plainly taught, and who is determined to obey the precepts, and comply with the conditions of the Gospel.

But the busy curiosity of men has not been satisfied with this simplicity of faith. To believe in mysteries has been found a much easier task, than to do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly; and hence many persons, in their notion of redemption through Christ, have indulged in fancies, which have little to do with the love of God, the religion of the heart, or a preparation for heaven. As a doctrine of speculation, however, it is fraught with no evil, when it does not obscure the luminous truths of the Gospel, and make men satisfied with a false faith at the expense of a holy practice.

Notwithstanding that the *manner* of salvation through Christ is not revealed, it may possibly be ascertained from the Scriptures. The inquiry is harmless, and perhaps a profitable one. Certain rules, however, ought to be instituted at the outset, and

rigidly followed. No results may be admitted, which are inconsistent with truths plainly revealed, or with the attributes of God, or with the nature of man, or with the commands of the Scriptures. Now the calvinistic notion of the *manner* of salvation has been proved to be at variance with these established principles. It destroys the attributes of the Deity, demolishes the ground work of piety, is not adapted to the nature and condition of man, and renders useless every Gospel precept. Unitarians have revolted at the thought of making such a doctrine a part of the christian religion. They have understood it to be a sacred principle, that God will not accomplish any purpose in a *manner*, which shall derogate from his moral perfections, or render nugatory his own commands; and they have never dared to set up a doctrine of inference in pointed opposition to numerous others, which harmonize with the divine attributes, and are laid down in unambiguous terms as truths of revelation and rules of conduct.

If they have run into errors, it is impossible that these should have any very injurious tendency; for in their opinions upon this subject, they have been extremely cautious, that every rule of morals and piety, every motive to holiness and obedience, should have its full weight. No scheme of atonement is admissible with them, which interferes in any possible degree with the practical parts of the Gospel. This statement of facts is testimony sufficient, that their views of atonement are at least innocent and salutary in affording encouragement to the practical duties.

This shall be made further to appear in a more particular examination.

In a former letter it was stated, that the opinions of Unitarians, respecting the influence of the death of Christ, may be arranged in three general divisions. They shall be thus arranged and examined in the present instance, with a particular regard to their moral tendency.

1. The death of Christ is considered as a *means* by which the pardon of sin is procured. Some do not think it a duty, nor a proper exercise, to inquire into the nature and operation of these means, as they relate to the Deity. The scheme of redemption is of divine appointment. God chose to bestow the gift of salvation in consequence of the death of Christ. The motives, which influenced his choice, make no part of the doctrine. That he could not have granted salvation in any other way is not affirmed; nor is it supposed, that he could not have pardoned sinners of his own good pleasure. Such a supposition would be setting bounds to his wisdom and power. It is only understood, that in the system, which God actually established to redeem the wicked from iniquity, the death of Christ was essential, and had a prevailing influence, although we are unacquainted with its precise nature and extent. Such is the opinion of many Unitarians, and I suppose of nearly all Trinitarians except Calvinists. Such was the opinion of Bishop Butler, although he seems to have entertained some notion of a vicarious suffering, which he has not made clear. Speaking of the

death of Christ, he observes, "How, and in what particular way, it had this efficacy, there are not wanting persons who have endeavoured to explain; but I do not find that the Scripture has explained it."* Dr. Price approves the opinion of Butler, and Bishop Magee has adopted nearly the same. It is common to many christians of all denominations.

You will hardly discover any thing here injurious to morals. This scheme, it is true, approaches that of the Calvinists, but not so nearly as to partake of its defects. It leaves the attributes of the Deity in their full perfection and exercise, and seeks out no method of salvation in which the moral agency and absolute obedience of man are not necessary. Whatever the influence of the death of Christ may have been, it had no part in satisfying divine justice, in making God more placable, or discharging the debt of the sinner; and it can operate only in favour of those, who walk in the footsteps of Christ, attain purity of heart and life, and use the freedom and privileges they enjoy, to the glory of God.

2. A second view embraces the *reasons* why God was pleased to accept the sufferings of Christ, as an inducement to pardon sinners. The foundation of the whole is believed to be his *obedience* and *goodness*. The merits of Christ's death, in the sight of God, consisted in his having conformed in all things to the divine will, submitted to innumerable trials and sufferings while on earth, and finally resigned himself

* Butler's Analogy, Part II. Chap. 5.

to the cruel death of the cross. He endured the persecutions of men with unyielding fortitude, returned good for evil to all his enemies, set an example of perfect holiness to the world, braved every danger in establishing the truth of his doctrines, and, to accomplish his work of obedience and righteousness, he even yielded up his life.

These deeds and traits of character were so rare, so disinterested, and so exalted in their nature and influence, that God was graciously pleased to reward him with the privilege and power of making his intercessions efficacious to the pardon of sinners. He has accordingly been constituted our advocate with the Father, our intercessor, whose obedience and death have given him free access to the throne of grace, and rendered his intreaties in our behalf available to our forgiveness and salvation. “We are saved, and ransomed, and pardoned,” says Emlyn, “by his blood, as that was the highest instance of consummate ‘obedience even to the death of the cross;’ with which the holy God was so pleased, that he exalted him to his right hand, and constituted him the only advocate, through whose mediation he would grant pardon and other favours to repenting sinners. His pardon is free in respect of any strict merit; therefore it is for ‘his own sake;’ but in respect of the mediation interposed, it is ‘for Christ’s sake’ also. So that pardon is immediately obtained by Christ’s intercession.”* Here we have an account of

* Emlyn’s Works, Vol. ii. p. 102.

the manner of salvation through Jesus Christ. His obedience is the first and principal step. As a reward for this, he has received power to obtain the pardon and salvation of the penitent, who forsake their sins, and become his worthy followers.*

Others have similar views, except that they believe the *obedience and righteousness of Christ* to be of themselves *immediately available* with the Deity to the forgiveness of sins. Although Christ has been exalted to the right hand of the Father, as testified in the Scriptures, and although his intercessions may be necessary to the prosperity of his church, and to the accomplishment of the great purposes of his dispensation, yet what he has already done is suf-

* This mode of explaining the efficacy of the death of Christ was also approved by Dr. Benson. In his *NOTES* on 1 John ii. 2, is contained the following paragraph, apparently quoted from some other writer, but without any reference.

"Jesus Christ, as a reward for his perfect obedience and willing suffering and death, has received of his Father all power, in heaven and earth; and among other things, power to recall wandering sinners into the ways of holiness, with an assurance of pardon and acceptance from God. And, upon this reconciling them to God, he expiates their sins. For, having rendered them meet objects of divine favour, he then gives them the strongest assurances, that God will be propitious or merciful unto them. And Christ will himself be finally honoured, by bestowing upon them the blessings promised to sincere penitents, namely, deliverance from death and misery, and a glorious resurrection to endless life and complete felicity. In this method are true penitents assured of pardon from God, through Jesus Christ, or cleansed from all sins." See *Benson's Paraphrase and Notes, 2nd edit. vol. ii. p. 523.*

Many of the early Socinians entertained similar views, as appears in a quotation from Wissowatius in a former letter. That this opinion was universal, is perhaps doubtful, as it is not insisted on by Crellius in his admirable reply to Grotius. *Responsio ad Librum Hugonis Grotii, quem de Satisfactione Christi, adversus Faustum Socinum Senensem scriptis.* But in this learned treatise, Crellius confines himself chiefly to what is clearly expressed in the Scriptures, and to the arguments of his opponent. *Vid. Frat. Polon. vol. iii.*

ficient to enlist the divine mercy in behalf of sinners, and to ensure their forgiveness. Many instances are recorded in holy writ, which show that God has rewarded the prayers and pious services of certain persons, by conferring favours and blessings on others. From analogy it may be inferred, that without any inconsistency with the order of providence or sense of Scripture, the same thing might take place in regard to Christ, whose piety and goodness were so eminent.

But these minor differences are of little importance, since they all look to the obedience and holy practice of Christ as the efficacious ground of pardon. The question is, whether this mode of viewing the subject throws any obstacles in the way of piety and morals; Is it a discouragement to obedience and a good life to believe, that by these Christ has rendered a most acceptable service to God; and that without these no man can hope for the salvation thus purchased for penitent transgressors? Is not the contrary true? Will not men be more likely to imitate the example of Christ, when they feel assured, that his virtues, his deeds of goodness and love, his generous sacrifices, his humble submission, and ardent piety, were the available means by which God was pleased to accept him as a Saviour, and to pardon and bless a wicked world? This will not be denied.

John Taylor has some excellent remarks bearing on this point, the appropriateness of which is a sufficient apology for quoting them at large. "The *love and obedience of Christ*," says he, "will appear a

very just foundation of the divine grace, and the most proper expedient to communicate it, and our redemption by Christ will stand in a just, clear, and beautiful light, if we duly consider, that truth, virtue, righteousness, being useful, and doing good, or which is the same thing, obedience to God, is the chief perfection of the intellectual nature. Intelligent beings are of all others the most excellent ; and the right use of the power of intelligence is the very highest glory and excellence of intelligent beings. Consequently, righteousness, goodness, and obedience, must be of the highest esteem and value with the Father of the universe, a most pure and perfect Spirit ; the only power, if I may so say, that can prevail with him, and the only acceptable *price* for purchasing any favours or blessings at his hands. And it must be the most sublime and perfect display of his wisdom and goodness to devise methods, and erect schemes for promoting righteousness, virtue, goodness, and obedience, because this is the most effectual way of promoting the truest excellency, honour, and happiness of his rational creatures. For which reason, he cannot in any other way exercise his perfections among the works of his hands more nobly and worthily.”*

This argument is rational, scriptural, and forcible. Place the subject in what position you will, and it must nevertheless be true at last, that a doctrine,

* Taylor’s Key to the Apostolic Writings, chap. viii. ¶ 151. “ This work,” says Bishop Watson, “ is greatly admired by the learned, as containing the best Introduction to the Epistles, and the clearest account of the whole Gospel scheme, which was ever written.” *Tracts, vol. iii.*

which assigns the highest rewards of heaven to the exercise of righteousness and a cultivation of the moral powers, will be eminently fitted to encourage good morals, and quicken the pious affections. This will hold true of the above opinion respecting the way of salvation through Christ, whether that opinion be an accurate deduction from the sense of Scripture or not. So far from invalidating, it helps to enforce every moral precept, not only by insisting on a holy life as a necessary preparation for enjoying the benefits of Christ's death, but by maintaining that the power of conferring these benefits has been granted on the same consideration.

3. A third opinion is that, which regards the agency of Christ in the salvation of sinners as *operating on men alone, and not on God.* The calvinistic scheme inculcates the notion, that the determinations of God were influenced, the rigour of his justice remitted, and his mercy called into action, by the sufferings and death of Christ. This same doctrine teaches, that God was thus reconciled to his rebellious children, and induced to receive them into favour; whereas, the uniform declaration of Scripture is, that God "has *reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ,*" and that "*God was in Christ reconeiling the world unto himself.*"* This is consistent with the character of the Supreme Being. He is unchangeable, and never was at variance with his creatures. The wicked have broken his laws, and by this reason are subject to the

* 2 Cor. v. 18, 19.

penalty of disobedience ; nor can they ever be reconciled to his good government, till their minds are renewed, their sins forsaken, and their characters changed. When this is done, a reconciliation will be brought about, not on the part of God, but of men. To produce this reconciliation, that is, to suppress all opposition to the wise and righteous laws of God, was the grand object of the Saviour's mission into the world.

God is the author of the whole ; and every thing in the economy of redemption is to be traced to his *love*, and not to wrath or vindictiveness, for no such emotions can exist in the divine nature. Not a more imposing truth presents itself in the whole tenour of Scripture, and the whole moral work of creation, than that “God is love.” The very reason why he sent his Son to be a Redeemer and a Saviour is declared to be, that he *loved the world*. The well being and happiness of his creatures contribute as much to his glory, as the beauty, order, and perfection of his works. In what can a holy God delight more, than in beholding the creatures, whom he has formed with high and varied powers, enjoying the felicity, which results from the noblest exercise of these divine gifts, and which exhibits in a brilliant light the power, wisdom, and benignity of their author ?

When they have unwiseley forsaken his counsels, and brought misery upon themselves, it does not excite anger in their heavenly Father, but compassion and mercy. Evil and misery are defects in his moral creation, which a regard for his own glory, and

for the perfection of his works, prompts him to remove. But to the wicked he cannot communicate the felicity of the blessed, till they cease from their wickedness. When they are changed, created anew, reconciled to God in holiness, turned from darkness to light, from the bondage of iniquity to the freedom of truth and righteousness, then God can bless them with spiritual gifts, and make them partakers of the rich treasures of his goodness. Jesus came to work this change, and put men in a condition in which they might receive the rewards, and enjoy the blessings, bestowed on those only, who are free from sin.

Now, as before observed, no person can be placed in this condition till he is released from his moral imperfections, whether these have arisen from the frailty of his nature, neglect of duty, or wilful transgression. Here we perceive the necessity of the pardoning mercy of God. But the Scriptures testify, that God pardons us *freely*, which could not be true, if he were influenced by any thing in the nature of an equivalent for sin, a price, or the payment of a debt. Salvation is a free gift of God's love and favour, or, as the Apostle expresses it, we are "justified *freely* by his grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus."* And it is the sense of all Scripture, that God pardons us *freely*, when we are reconciled to him. He could not pardon us before, without violating the rectitude of his own laws; and if he could, we should have no ability to enjoy the bles-

* Rom. iii. 24.

sings of salvation, while in a state of wickedness and rebellion.

Here again we discover the compassion and goodness of God, in making known the terms of pardon, or rather the condition in which pardon can be of any service to us; and also in sending Jesus Christ to afford us every possible aid and inducement to accept these terms. Repentance and obedience are the conditions, and the sole conditions, on which God has professed a willingness to accept sinners. His language is, "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon."^{*} Here the promise of pardon is extended to such as forsake their sins. The prophets preached *repentance*, John the Baptist preached repentance, so did the Saviour, and so did the Apostles. It is, indeed, impressed upon us throughout the sacred oracles, as a truth never to be overlooked, that God will freely forgive those, and those only, who sincerely repent, who forsake their sins, and walk in the ways of holiness. He asks nothing more; he demands only what the sinner can render; his sovereign mercy will supply the deficiency. Pardon is not promised through Christ to the incorrigible sinner; but when, in consequence of what Christ has done, men become holy in faith and practice, their past sins will then be no longer impu-

* Isaiah, iv. 7.

ted to them, but will be blotted out by the special favour of God, according to his promise.

By these reflections we are conducted to a distinct understanding of the agency of Christ in the redemption and salvation of sinners. He has been an instrument in reconciling transgressors to their Maker, and thus causing them to accept the conditions on which God has signified his readiness to pardon the guilty. The whole has consisted in turning them from ignorance to knowledge, from evil to good, from blindness of mind, and hardness of heart, to a love of God and reverence of his glorious attributes, from the degrading thraldom of sin to the heavenly attainments of a pure religion, and the joyful hopes of an immortal felicity. Christ has been instrumental in the salvation of sinners by conquering the power of evil in the human heart, and subduing the spirit of opposition to the divine will.

This purpose he has accomplished in various ways. Every thing *done by him* which has a tendency to reconcile men to God, constitutes a part of his great work. His instructions, his preaching, his wonderful Sermon on the Mount, his appropriate and beautiful parables, his advice, counsel, warnings, threatenings, promises, have their respective important effects. His miracles repeatedly performed to prove, that he was the Son of God in a high and peculiar sense, and that he acted by the aid, and guidance, and power of his Father and our Father, these hold a distinguished place in the work of redemption through Christ, by convincing men of the truth of his doctrines, and strengthening their confidence in the di-

vinity of his character. The holy and perfect example of Christ, his piety and humble submission to God, his deeds of goodness and love, his disinterested and unceasing benevolence, his patience in adversity and fortitude under every trial, his invariable uprightness of conduct and excellence of temper, all these are so many incitements to repentance and a good life.

The same may be said of his *doctrines*, the character which he exhibits of the Supreme being, the requisitions of the law and the effects of divine mercy, the terms of pardon, and especially the great doctrine of a future state of retribution, the accountability of man for all his actions, and the certainty that every one will hereafter be judged, and rewarded or punished according to the use he makes of his present endowments and privileges. And lastly, the *sufferings* of Christ during his whole life, and especially at the time of his condemnation by his murderous persecutors, his death under the most aggravating and cruel circumstances, his triumphant resurrection, his appearance to his disciples afterwards, and, to crown the whole, his glorious ascension to heaven in the presence of many witnesses; these were events of the greatest moment in giving power to his religion, converting sinners to faith in its doctrines and a knowledge and practice of its precepts, and thus redeeming them from iniquity, and procuring the salvation of their souls, by making them fit subjects for the pardoning mercy of God.

Hence, redemption through Christ is not a conse-

quence of his death alone, nor of any one single act, but of all he did, taught, and suffered during his ministry on earth, in connexion with the part he may still be acting in his exalted station. It has been truly observed by Henry Taylor and others, that the Scriptures do not speak of our salvation by the death of Christ alone. We are there said to be “ saved by faith, by works, by the word of God, by baptism, by grace,” and by many other things, as well as by the death of Christ, yet no one supposes, that we can be saved by either of these singly, but by all combined.

Tillotson has well described the offices of Christ in procuring salvation. “ By all he did and suffered for us in the days of his flesh, and in the state of his humiliation, and by all that he still continues to do for us, now that he is in heaven at the right hand of God, he hath effected and brought about the great work of salvation. His doctrine and his life, his death and sufferings, his resurrection from the dead, and his powerful intercession for us at the right hand of God, have all a great influence in reforming and saving mankind ; and by all these ways and means he is the author and cause of our salvation.”* Thus Jesus redeems men, or takes away their sins, by all his actions and doctrines together, and by the power and influence of his religion to reform the wicked, re-

* Tillotson’s Works, vol. vii. p. 2069.

The opinion of Tillotson on the atonement seems to have resembled those of Butler, Price, and Magee ; yet, perhaps, he speaks more explicitly than they have done respecting the death of Christ as in some way affecting divine justice. See his Sermon entitled, *Christ the Author, and Obedience the Condition of Salvation.*

generate their depraved hearts, and convert them to holiness of life and temper.

Such is the view of many christians concerning the mode of salvation through Christ. And now it may be permitted to inquire, what its natural tendency ought to be on practical morals and religion? Does it encourage men to harbour a single evil thought, purpose, or desire; to neglect a single duty of piety or charity? Does it hold out any substitute for personal holiness, or any incitements to the vicious propensities? Does it conceal the odiousness of sin and its dreadful consequences, or relax the obligations of moral duty, or weaken the sense of accountableness to God for every thought and action? Does it degrade the majesty of the law, or enfeeble the authority of the divine commands, or lessen the certainty of a future judgment and righteous retribution?

Not one of these questions can be answered in the affirmative. The view above described has not even this negative tendency; and in truth, it is remarkable for nothing more, than its positive moral and religious bearing; that is, if you will allow morals and religion to consist in good practice. It finds no efficacy in any scheme of redemption, nor any hope for the sinner, without repentance and obedience, devout submission to the will of God, and profound reverence of his holy character. Nor does it take repentance for an empty name, nor look for its value alone in emotions of sorrow, and remorse of conscience for past guilt. To repent is to reform. to

forsake sin, to do good where evil has been done before. It is to make our faith a purifying principle, to amend the heart, subdue the passions, banish evil desires, to love where we have hated, and to return kindness for injury. To repent is to examine and watch our own hearts, love God supremely, and our neighbour as ourselves. Whoever sincerely obeys, will sincerely repent. Obedience ensures repentance. The latter is turning from evil, the former is doing good; the one inspires respect for the divine laws, the other applies them to practice. Both are absolutely essential to salvation through Christ.

Can that opinion, which regards a good life as the foundation and means of final acceptance with God, and of eternal felicity, can such an opinion be charged with having an unfavourable influence on morals? The charge is equally absurd and ill founded and demands no refutation. It is enough to have stated facts; the conclusion is self evident.

Nor is it a just inference, which some have drawn, that this view unduly exalts *human merit*. The truth is, that in relation to God, no merit on the part of man is supposed. The whole is of divine mercy, it is the exclusive work of God, the merit is his, and to him belongs all the praise. By his compassion alone he was inclined to save and bless his creatures; he sent his Son to redeem them from their sins by publishing the conditions of pardon, and performing works to aid their restoration to holiness, which could not have been performed without light, guidance, and support from heaven. The actions of men have

no merit, except as the testimony of obedience. They are of no value as a price of salvation. God saves *freely*. Every act of obedience is an act of duty, and is so far meritorious, as to deserve the promised reward, because God has promised it, and not because any benefit is conferred on him. As far as there is any merit in complying with the conditions of divine forgiveness, so far is human merit exalted by the above views of the manner of salvation, and no farther.

Finally, the comparative moral tendency of the Calvinistic and Unitarian schemes of atonement, may be expressed in a few words. Calvinists ascribe salvation to a cause, which puts all human agency out of the question, renders personal holiness unnecessary, and personal responsibility impossible. Unitarians, on the contrary, refer the original cause of salvation to the mercy of God, and dare not indulge any hope of immortal glory, which does not rest on a faithful obedience of the divine laws, as revealed and confirmed by Jesus Christ. Calvinists inculcate morals, it is true, but they have found out a way of salvation, which does not require good morals, or rather in which they can be of no service. The principles of Unitarians, more rigid and consistent, demand perfect obedience, without any such discouragement to virtuous and holy living. Calvinists, to be religious, must believe one thing and practise another; with Unitarians, faith and practical religion are in harmony.

PART IV.

COMPARATIVE MORAL TENDENCY OF THE LEADING DOCTRINES OF CALVI- NISM AND THE SENTIMENTS OF UNI- TARIANS.

LETTER I.

Calvinistic and Unitarian Views of the Depravity of Man.

SIR,

WE come now to a consideration of the more peculiar doctrines of Calvinism; or those doctrines which owe their origin to the metaphysics of Austin, their growth and strength to the genius of Calvin, and their maturity to the deliberations at the Synod of Dort. They may be arranged in the following order, namely, *total depravity*, *irresistible grace*, *divine decrees*, *particular redemption*, and *final perseverance*. These are the five links in the Calvinistic chain, and so closely depending on each other, that, should one be broken, all the rest must fall. According to Calvinists, this chain constitutes the entire system of Christianity; it comprises faith, charity

virtue, piety; it embraces the whole compass of the divine dispensations to the moral creation, and points out the only possible method by which the Maker of the universe could bless any portion of his creatures with salvation and eternal life.

Some of these doctrines you enumerate, and you profess to account it an evidence of the immorality of Unitarians, that they do not believe and preach them. Whether this be a just conclusion we are now to examine.

It is but fair to premise, that you acknowledge some friends among Unitarians, whom you esteem, and who "set an example of integrity, benevolence, and active virtue." But lest it should be thought that you allow even these to have the virtues of *Christians*, you immediately ask, "may not the same be said of many Deists, from Lord Herbert down to the present day?" Whether your unitarian friends will take this as a compliment or not, this is no place to inquire. If it has been your ill fortune, however, to find none among them, who showed from their professions, lives, and conversation, that they acted from higher motives than those of deism, I must think your acquaintance has been extremely limited, and must lament, that you should feel warranted from information so slender, in denying the christian name to a whole denomination of professed Christians. Every sincere unitarian must hope, that those who differ from him in faith, will hereafter be more fortunate than you have been, in the friendships they may form, and the acquaintances they may contract, with his brethren. I am willing to grant, however,

in passing, that so far as you have testified, that the Unitarians, who, most unluckily for their brethren, have enjoyed your friendship, are without *christian* morals, you have proved the fact of your charges. But your premises are too narrow for your conclusions. If you had said, that all Unitarians, whom you ever knew, were no better than deists in principles and practice, the subject would stand on a very different footing. It would be an affair exclusively between you, and your private unitarian friends. But now it comes in another, and a vastly more important shape. You embrace Unitarians "all over the world," and consequently all must feel themselves implicated in your charges.

After some preliminary remarks you go on to speak as follows.

"The Unitarian mode of preaching is more acceptable to the taste of carnal, worldly men, than any other kind of preaching. And can any one, who reflects a moment, or who has eyes to see, and ears to hear, doubt that this is the fact? All unitarian preachers, that I ever heard of, teach their hearers, that human nature is not so depraved, as calvinists believe; that regeneration is unnecessary; that the various exercises of mind, supposed by many to be essential to piety, are mere dreams of enthusiasm; that the strictness and seclusion from fashionable amusements, such as the theatre, the ball room, and the card table, which some inculcate, are uncommanded austerities, and being 'righteous over much,' and that all men, whatever may be their character, will finally be saved, or annihilated."

This you state as a “fair specimen of the doctrine inculcated by unitarian preachers *all over the world*,” and then infer, that those, who can preach thus, and approve such preaching, must necessarily be among the more immoral part of the community.

It cannot escape observation, that you profess to build this description of unitarian preaching upon *hearsay*. You produce no authority to confirm your statement, nor do you pretend to derive your knowledge from personal observation, or enlarged inquiry. But admitting you sincerely believe your impressions to be correct, which I certainly do not doubt, are you willing to take upon yourself the responsibility of bringing reproach and censure on the whole body of Unitarians, with nothing better to sustain you, than idle rumour, and the poisoned breath of evil report? Nay more, suppose you can make it appear, that some individual among them has actually been known to preach exactly in the manner you describe, do you think it fair to judge them all by this example? Is there a single sect in Christendom, who would think themselves well used to be judged as a body by the opinions, preaching, and conduct of some one, two, or half a dozen prominent men, who might be selected from among them? Would you think it just, or honourable, in a Unitarian to judge Presbyterians in this way? And especially, would you think it just, or honourable, or christian-like in him, if he had never listened to the preaching of Presbyterians, and relied on what he had heard for his knowledge, to charge them as a

sect with preaching to please the immoral and licentious? This is a fair test, and one which you can apply to your own conscience and sense of propriety.

All Unitarians sincerely believe, that the peculiar doctrines of Calvinism, if allowed to have their full effect on the mind and principles, are of the most immoral tendency. They consequently believe, that preaching these doctrines will have, and does have, a bad influence on society. But would you think them justified by this belief in maintaining that all persons, who are fond of hearing these doctrines preached, thereby give unusual tokens of the depravity of their hearts, and looseness of their lives? It is presumed you would not. Why then judge others upon principles, which no man is willing to have applied to himself? Unitarians believe it possible for Calvinists to be good people and good christians, even in defiance of their principles. Conscience, reason, common sense, and the plain practical parts of scripture have a stronger power, for the most part, than the dark dogmas of theologists; and however the latter may pervert the former, it is no easy thing for them to assume an entire ascendancy.

For this reason, Unitarians do not call Calvinists deists, when they find them departing, as they think, most deplorably from the true faith of the Scriptures, or showing in their conduct little respect for their principles. We consider them christians, not for their virtues alone, nor their distinctive tenets, but because they believe in Jesus Christ as their Saviour, and profess to be guided by his Gospel. Nor do we

think we ought to deny them the christian name, because, in addition to the essential articles of faith, they hold to many errors dangerous to morals, and holy living. Nor, because we find deists apparently as moral and virtuous as many Calvinists, do we think it the part of charity, or an evidence of a christian spirit, to rank them together in regard to their principles, motives, expectations, and the ground of their hopes. And yet we feel, that we may with just as much propriety take this course against Calvinists, as they can do it against us.

We are induced to embrace our views of the christian doctrines, not simply from the conviction, that they are more rational and scriptural than the prevailing notions of many of our christian brethren, who differ from us, but because we are fully persuaded that they are vastly more efficacious in promoting vital godliness, and keeping alive the pure spirit of religion, the essential duties of piety and morality. They are calculated to draw us to a more fervent love and reverence of God, and make us more devoted to the interests of our fellow-men, by kindling our sympathy, strengthening our good affections, and enlarging the bounds of our benevolence. This obvious tendency of our principles we think a very strong confirmation of their truth, and it is one of the chief reasons, why we value them so dearly, and adhere to them with so much confidence and joy.

You have taken much pains to exhibit the picture in another light, or rather to show it in darkness;

and it is your efforts in this work on which I am now about to make a few brief remarks. But the comparative moral tendency of Unitarianism and Calvinism, as you have started the subject, is too large a field to think of compassing in the narrow limits prescribed to these letters. To trace out the mischievous consequences of the calvinistic doctrines, both as they affect the character of God, the nature, ability, and agency of man, the happiness of society, the rules of virtue, the principles of piety, and the practice of holiness, would not be a work of limited extent. I can only touch upon some of the more prominent particulars, in the order in which you have brought them forward; by which it will be seen, in the first place, that you have very imperfect notions of what Unitarians actually preach; and in the second place, that you have false conceptions of the tendency of their preaching.

You begin by saying, that *unitarian preachers teach their hearers, that human nature is not so depraved as Calvinists believe.* This is not denied. But the inference, which you would draw from it, is denied, namely, that the doctrine as taught by these preachers is less moral in its influence, than it is as taught by Calvinists. In the opinion of all, but Calvinists themselves, the fact is the contrary. After the doctrine of election and reprobation, which is the combining and sustaining principle, the life and soul of Calvinism, there is none, which derogates more from the highest moral attributes of the Deity, or more completely destroys all moral ability in man,

than the notion of *total depravity*, as explained by Calvinists. Allow me to state this doctrine in the expressive language of the symbol adopted by the Presbyterian Church. “From this original corruption, whereby we are utterly indisposed, disabled and *made opposite* to all good, and *wholly inclined to all evil*, do proceed all actual transgressions.” Again, “Man, by his fall into a state of sin, hath *wholly lost all ability of will to any spiritual good* accompanying salvation; so as a natural man, being altogether averse from that which is good, and dead in sin, is not able, by his own strength to convert himself, or to *prepare himself thereunto*.^{**}” From this statement, which is sufficiently perspicuous, it would seem, that from our very nature we have no power to do any good thing; that, notwithstanding our endeavours, every word, thought, and deed, is a heinous offence in the sight of God, adds new violence to the flames of his wrath, and sinks us deeper and deeper under the curse of his law. And what is worse, not only every act is a sin, but every sin is equally aggravating. There can be no gradation in crimes, which proceed from a heart perfectly depraved. Hence, the infinitude of sin is a calvinistic doctrine.[†] Every effort we make to please God, by seeking holiness and obeying his laws, only helps to sharpen the fierceness of his an-

* Confession of Faith, chap. vi. § 4. ix. § 3.

† I know Calvinists are not agreed on this subject of infinite sin. It is becoming fashionable to deny it, but no one, who ventures so far, can be accounted a consistent calvinist. With this feature marred, the system loses a very striking part of its symmetry.

ger; every step we take in what we think to be the path of duty, virtue, piety, and a good life, carries us so much further towards the wretchedness and ruin, which, it would appear, are our just portion for being what God has made us.

To say nothing of the extreme absurdity of this doctrine in the abstract, what effect *ought* it to produce on him, who fancies he sincerely believes it? What must necessarily be his feelings towards his Maker? Can you love him, who punishes you for an offence, which he compels you to commit? What is there amiable, or benevolent, or glorious, or lovely in such a Being? Can we feel gratitude to him, who has created us to be wretched, not by reason of our own follies, or transgressions, but by his arbitrary appointment? If it were possible for us to realize these traits of his character, could we approach him with thanksgiving, reverence, and praise? Should we not detest a human magistrate, who would be so unreasonable, vindictive and cruel? And how can we love that in God, which is so abhorrent to every principle of our nature in men?

Preach this doctrine of total depravity, and total inability to any man, and if he believes you, and is in his senses, he certainly will not strive to do what you tell him it is utterly impossible for him to do. He will not cultivate the love of God and man, the mild, amiable, and exalted virtues; he will not cherish the kind affections, the spirit of meekness, forbearance and charity; he will not administer to the necessitous, nor console the afflicted; he will not sub-

due his passions, restrain his desires, resist temptation, nor avoid evil,—he will make no attempt to do any of these things, and for a very good reason,—all such attempts would be vain, and only prove his folly and weakness. What is there in this doctrine, preached in its true spirit and full extent, which would be likely to make any one a virtuous, holy man, a good citizen, or a candidate for heaven? Let it be generally understood in the world, that no man can possibly do any other than a wicked action, and that every action, or crime, is equally wicked, and do you believe such a doctrine, reduced to practice, would contribute much to the peace of society, or the establishment of morals and religion? Is it not evident to a demonstration, that it would dissolve all social order, break the cords of the strongest compact, poison all that is pure in principle, and destroy all that is holy in practice? Such is the calvinistic doctrine of depravity, when exhibited without sophistry, and divested of the clouds, which have been gathered around it in the misty ages of school theology.

Unitarians, it is very true, preach no such depravity as this. They dare not pamper the evil propensities of men by preaching to them, that they sin from necessity, and have no power to amend their lives, and please their Maker. They dare not preach a doctrine of such mischievous tendency, which they do not find supported in the Scriptures, and at which every principle of the understanding revolts. They preach, that all men are depraved, deeply depraved,

and sinners in the sight of God—not by the will and appointment of their Creator, but by their own choice, their neglect of duty, and their obstinate disobedience.

There is no theme, in fact, on which unitarian preachers dwell more, than on the moral depravity of man. This is the moral disease, which they believe the religion of Jesus was intended to heal. As a free agent, man has contracted this disease, and as a free agent he has the power of applying an effectual remedy, by using the means granted in the religion of Christ. They describe the wretched state of the sinner, as the result of his own follies, his abuse of his better faculties, his disregard of the counsel and chiding of conscience, and of the obligations of the divine laws. They call on him to awake from his slumbers, to seek light rather than darkness, to renew his depraved heart, to lay hold on the promises of Christ, and to establish the hope of their fulfilment, by studying the will of God as revealed in the Gospel, by giving strict heed to the perfect law of faith, love, and righteousness, which this Gospel contains, by walking resolutely and undeviatingly in the footsteps of Christ, and by making his precepts, and these alone, the rule of their lives. They urge these duties by all the motives set forth in the Gospel, by the perfections of God, the dependence of man, the promise and prospects of joy to the righteous, the threatenings of despair and suffering to the wicked. They afford not a single palliative to the sinner's conscience, not a single excuse for his

shameful irresolution, or his rebellious obstinacy, by telling him, that his Maker has formed him with a total, inherent, irremediable wickedness of nature, which no effort of his own can remove. Why should you preach repentance and holiness to such a being, unless it were to deride his impotency, or to make still deeper the shades of despair, which you have caused to brood upon his soul ? Why suspend the awful judgments of God over the impenitent sinner, and then aggravate his misery by assuring him, that he has no power to escape ?

It is unnecessary to pursue the parallel farther. I am willing to let the decision rest on these short hints. With these alone let the question be submitted to the understanding and common sense of every reader, whether the doctrine of depravity, as taught by Calvinists, of Unitarians, is the most likely to strengthen the cause of morals ? Whether the doctrine, which makes men radically, necessarily, and perfectly wicked, and takes away all ability of improvement, is better calculated to fix the principles of religion in the soul, and to produce the fruits of piety, righteousness, and a good life, than the one, which lays the sins of every man to his own charge, which exhorts him to throw off the shackles he has thus forged for himself, confess his follies, repent of his wicked deeds, seek God, and live ?

LETTER II.

Conversion, or Divine Influence, as understood by Calvinists and Unitarians.

SIR,

THE next point of Calvinism, from the denial of which you infer the immorality of Unitarians, is that of *irresistible grace*, or, as it is otherwise denominat-
ed, special grace, effectual calling, extraordinary di-
vine influence, regeneration, or conversion.

In the calvinistic sense, Unitarians no doubt deny, that this doctrine has any foundation in Scripture, or any other than an evil influence on the character of men; but when you assert in general language, that they teach *regeneration to be unnecessary*, you mistake. So far from denying the necessity of regeneration, it is a truth well known to all, who have any accurate knowledge of the subject, that among no denomina-
tion of christians is it preached more earnestly, or more constantly, than among Unitarians. They con-
sider it a fundamental doctrine of religion, and im-
mediately connected with the doctrine of depravity. They believe, as firmly as Calvinists, that men are sinners, and must be reformed, that they are deprav-
ed and must be renewed. This reformation, or re-
newal, they call regeneration, or conversion, and hold it to be absolutely essential before any one can be in

that state of holiness, and freedom from sin, which will fit him for the eternal presence of God, and the blessings of heaven, as revealed in the Gospel. Since this is the truth, it is obvious with what singular inaccuracy your assertion was made.

In attempting to defend your position, that we “look in vain for the monuments of the reforming and purifying power” of Unitarianism, instead of adducing facts and examples, which alone can have any weight in a case of this nature, you inquire whether *sound conversions*, or *genuine revivals* of religion are known among Unitarians. What is this inquiry to the purpose? Do you find good men, exemplary in their lives, constant in their devotions, manifesting practical love to their neighbour and their God? If you have found such, you have had before your eyes the monuments, which you say are wanting. The question relates simply to the *character* of those, who have embraced this faith, and not to the means by which this character has been formed; to the existing *monuments* of its power, and not to the manner in which these monuments have been reared. Why ask about conversions, if you find the fruits of conversion? To say these do not exist, is begging the question; it is the *petitio principii* of the dialectician; taking for granted the very thing which you were called on to prove.

You have evaded this the most important part of the subject, and drawn the attention of your readers to the good effects, which you say have been produced in particular cases by your own sentiments. After

a vivid picture of this sort, you abruptly ask the question, whether "Unitarianism can show such effects?" And then answer it as abruptly, "if it can, they are unknown to me." Do you think this good reasoning? Are you willing to judge of the effects of Unitarianism "all over the world," by your personal observation? As you probably have never lived a week together in a society composed of Unitarians, how is it possible, let these effects have been what they might, that they should not be *unknown* to you? Under such circumstances, how could you know the power of unitarian principles to subdue the stubborn will, soften the hardened heart, humble the proud, restrain the vicious, call forth the pious affections of the devout worshipper, promote christian harmony, purity, and love, and in short, to ensure the conduct of a sincere, humble, and faithful follower of Jesus? These are things, which work, or ought to work, silently in the heart, and show themselves in the temper and private character of individuals. The moment they are allowed to go abroad, and be blazoned to the world, they leave no trivial grounds for suspecting more of hypocrisy, than of humble piety, or of the movings of the holy Spirit of God. Hence your argument for the immorality of Unitarians, drawn from your ignorance of the actual effects of their principles, is as illogical as it is uncharitable. It is certainly extraordinary, that you should think it sufficient proof against the christian morals and piety of any sect, that such exercises as usually attend these graces were *unknown* to you, when your personal ob-

servation was so circumscribed, and your means of knowledge so limited.

It is no part of my undertaking to boast of the high religious attainments of those with whom I accord in sentiment, and unite in worship, or to hold them up as more holy than other christians, and ready to cry out on all occasions, like Jehu of old, "Come, see my zeal for the Lord." I aim at nothing more than a plain defence, a bare vindication. I shall not, therefore, impose any tax upon your patience by going into a history of their conversions, or detailing remarkable instances of their piety, self denial, humility; of their patience in tribulation, and meekness under persecution; of their forbearance when assailed by the reproaches and scorn of the world; of their perseverance through evil report and good report in accomplishing what their principles and the voice of conscience dictate, and in fine, of their joyful triumph over every calamity, even death itself, while sustained by the bright hopes, and cheering anticipations inspired by their views of the religion of the Saviour. These things I willingly leave to speak for themselves, and have much reason to hope and trust, that they will speak loudly to every honest inquirer and candid observer. Had you known more of the persons, with whose religious feelings you have dealt so harshly, I am constrained to believe you would have been less ready to ask, "who has ever heard" of these things?

What strikes one most forcibly in your view of this subject, is, that you confound distinctions, and make

no difference between conversion, and the object to be obtained by conversion. Yet surely these are not the same thing. Conversion is a *means* for the attainment of a certain end. And what is this end, but such a measure of knowledge, virtue, piety, and holiness, as constitutes a truly religious character? Conversion is valuable only for its effects, and yet you speak of it as being itself the only thing of importance, and as if these effects could be produced in no way except by the influence of this doctrine, not as others think they ought to interpret it, but as you choose to interpret it yourself.

Admit the fact, that Unitarians do not hold the necessity of conversion in the calvinistic sense; suppose them to believe that God is not limited in his power or wisdom, and may employ a great variety of means in bringing his rational creatures to a sense of their sins, a knowledge of their duty, an humble contrition, sincere repentance, and practical holiness. By what process can these facts be framed into an argument against their moral character? Morality does not consist in a doctrine, an opinion, or a pretence. The apostle says, that *the fruit of the spirit is, in all, goodness, and righteousness, and truth.* Where this fruit appears, why do you stop to ask by what operations of the spirit it has been produced? Are you not contented, that God should have taken his own way? Unitarians hold, not less than other Christians, that their sins must be forsaken, their wicked hearts renewed, and all their passions, thoughts, and affections, brought into subjection to the will of God, before they can

expect his promised favour, or have any hopes of the rewards of his glory. But they do not, like Calvinists, hold that God is restricted in the mode he may adopt to accomplish this purpose; nor do they consider the *mode* of greater moment than the *purpose* itself.

Let us now attend to the doctrine under consideration, as described by Calvinists, and then proceed to examine its moral influence, as compared with that of unitarian views of the same subject. The calvinistic notion of regeneration, or conversion, has for its basis the total depravity of human nature. Since this takes away all moral ability from man, he can do nothing towards regenerating himself. As the Confession of Faith testifies, he cannot even *prepare himself* for any good purpose. No alternative remains. It must be wholly the work of divine power. It is made sure by the sovereign decree of election, which men can do nothing either to resist, or procure. God has not only arbitrarily, and unconditionally, appointed a certain number to eternal life, but he has “fore-ordained *all the means* thereunto.” The agency of man is as completely out of the question, as if he were a block of marble, or a stock of wood. “Neither are any other redeemed by Christ, effectually called, justified, adopted, sanctified, and saved, *but the elect only.*” And to give a consistent finishing to the whole, it is added, “The rest of mankind, God was pleased—to pass by, and to ordain them to

dishonour, and wrath for their sin, to the praise of his glorious justice.”*

And again; “ All those whom God hath predestinated unto life, *and those only*, he is pleased, in his appointed and accepted time, effectually to call by his word and spirit, out of that state of sin and death, in which they are by nature, to grace and salvation, by Jesus Christ.—This effectual call is of God’s free and special grace alone, not from any thing at all foreseen in man, *who is altogether passive therein*, until, being quickened and removed by the Holy Spirit, he is thereby enabled to answer this call, and to embrace the grace offered and conveyed in it.”† From these words it seems, that the conversion of a sinner consists in a simple execution of a divine decree made from all eternity, without any regard to the future disposition or conduct of the person to be converted, or as it is expressed in another place, “ without any foresight of faith or good works.” The sinner has no concern in the work, for he is declared to be “ altogether passive therein.” This is plain language, and needs no illustration.

According to the calvinistic scheme, therefore, all who are saved are regenerated by the unalterable purpose, and irresistible power of the Almighty. The rest are condemned, and absolutely deprived of all means of regeneration, by the same arbitrary determination. The wrath of their Maker is kindled

* Confession of Faith, chap. III. § 6. 7.

† Ibid. chap. X. § 1. 2.

against them from the moment of their birth, and he pursues them with his relentless rage throughout every period of their existence. This is a doctrine, it is true, which the wiser sort of Calvinists of the present day strive much to keep out of sight. The same prudent caution is exercised in your Sermon and Reply. It is nevertheless a most prominent doctrine of Calvinism; and in former times, when men loved mysteries more than truth, and while the darkness of the middle ages was still lingering in the human mind, it was a doctrine, which its advocates were not ashamed to avow, nor afraid to defend.

That the above conclusions are not loosely drawn, and give no distorted view of the subject, as understood by Calvinists, might be shown, if it were necessary, by appealing to their most celebrated writers. No man, if I mistake not, is accounted a more able expounder of the dark things of Calvinism, than Herman Witsius; no man, perhaps, has descended farther into the hidden corners of this mystical system. He tells us, that “the covenant of grace, with respect to us, *has no conditions*;” and also, “that a right to life, neither is, nor *can be* founded on any actions of ours, but on the righteousness of our Lord *alone*, who having perfectly fulfilled the righteousness of the law for us, *nothing can in justice be required of us to perform*, in order to acquire a right already purchased for us. And, indeed, in this all the orthodox readily agree.” And afterwards he says of the covenant of grace, “it is not possible it should be made void by any unbelief of the elect, nor acquire

its stability from any faith of man." He quotes Cloppenburg, Junius, and other great names to the same effect. He makes Junius say, that "the conditions being fulfilled by the angel of the covenant, the catholic church was through and for him constituted heir of eternal life *without any condition.*"*

We thus see in what consists the means of regeneration, as taught by Calvinists. It is completely an arbitrary, necessary work, in which the individual, whatever exercises of mind, or change of character, he may go through, has no freedom of thought, will, or action. The elect *must* be regenerated, they *must* be saved; those not elected *cannot* be regenerated, they *cannot* be saved. The doctrine irresistibly comes to this point, however it may be modified, explained, or smoothed over.

As Unitarians, and many christians of other denominations, can find no such doctrine in the Scriptures, but conceive all the positive parts, and, indeed, the whole tenour of scripture opposed to it, they cannot of course believe it in the sense in which it is here stated. And if they could find evidence, that the mode of irresistible influence is sometimes resorted to by the Deity to convert sinners, the powerful testimony of experience would convince them, that the doctrine which teaches the *necessity* of this

* Witsius' Economy of the Covenants, p. 402; Chapter on God's Covenant with the Elect. The above quotations are made from the New-York edition of the English translation of this work. This is certainly a very wretched translation, but we are assured in the preface, that "it gives the author's true sense."

mode under all circumstances, is most fallacious in its indications, and most injurious in its consequences.

If there be any truth, or any value in the doctrine, it must carry with itself an unfailing testimony. That is, persons under the arbitrary operations of the Spirit must have infallible means of knowing the fact, that they may not be deceived by their own imaginations, and be led into a false and dangerous security. An irresistible influence of the Deity is in all respects miraculous, and as such must operate with a violence on the established laws of the human constitution, which cannot be mistaken. And yet, what has been the test to which appeals have universally been made? Has it not been certain impressions, emotions, feelings, transports, ecstacies, which are usually the exuberant growth of a warm imagination? Has there ever been an instance in which appeals have been made to the understanding? Has any one ever made it appear, that his intellect was enlightened, his judgment improved, or his wisdom increased by the irresistible agency of the divine Spirit? No. How is it, then, that the spirit of God always acts upon that quality of our nature, which of all others is the most fallible, fluctuating, and deceptive? The very same effects, and to their fullest extent, which are urged as a proof of divine interposition, are frequently produced by natural causes, and exist where there is no renewal of heart, or reformation of character. Is it credible, that the Supreme Being descends into the hearts of men with a miraculous agency of his Spirit, without giving

them at the same time light and power to judge between his operations, and the deceptions of a heated imagination?

You will say, probably, that such persons as are really the objects of this agency, are never without a conviction, which with them amounts to absolute certainty. I am aware this is asserted by many, who are sincere, and have a confidence in the reality of their impressions. But, in my mind, no stronger proof can be given of the fallaciousness of the doctrine. In the first place, their convictions come through the feelings and the fancy. And then, these persons are by no means always distinguished for more than ordinary purity of morals, or warmth of piety; so that it has been said, with too much truth, by a writer more distinguished for his genius than his piety, “if we are told a man is *religious*, we still ask, *what are his morals?*” And last of all, these persons often have totally opposite opinions respecting some of the most important articles of christian truth, which they all profess with equal confidence to receive from a divine illumination. But the Spirit of God can dictate only truth, and truth is always the same. With what encouragement can we rely on the convictions of those, who, with equal sincerity and confidence, make contradictory assertions? When it shall happen, that all persons, who profess to have immediate aid from above, to free them from sin and enlighten them with truth, shall be found uniformly more zealous in doing the deeds of piety and love, than other christians of humbler pretensions; and when they

shall agree in reporting the truths, which they have received from the instructions of the spirit, so far at least as to avoid contradictions and inconsistences, they will exhibit better reasons for believing themselves actuated by the irresistible agency of the Spirit of God.

Again, if a change is thus miraculously wrought, how does it happen, that in such a great number of instances the effect soon dies away? Look around among those, who have been the subjects of what are commonly called religious revivals, and observe how large a proportion return in a short time to their former condition and habits. The most zealous, confident, and ecstatic, will frequently be among the first to sink back to the apathy, from which at one time they imagined themselves to have been raised by the special agency of the Holy Spirit. Will you say that such are not truly converted, or that they resist the spirit? The first is certain, but of the last who is to judge? The person, who falls away, is as certain of being under a spiritual influence, as any one who retains this conviction for years, and even through his whole life. But falling away was a proof that he was deceived. Very true; yet if one may be deceived for a month or a day, so may another as long as he lives. Hence it is the very excess of presumption to set up any pretensions, or make any assertions in the case.

Nor ought any one to rely on this kind of influence, till he can prove that the days of miracles have never ceased. Conversion, upon calvinistic principles,

is as much a miracle, as it would be to stop the sun in its course, or raise the dead to life. But as no proof can be advanced, that miracles have been wrought since the time of the Apostles even for great purposes, such as promoting the divine dispensations, or the general interests of mankind; where is the humility, modesty, or good sense in any man's pretending, that the Supreme Being has condescended to change the course of nature in his behalf, especially when the same argument, which he uses to convince himself of this fact, is used with equal assurance by others, who are confessedly deceived?

It is hardly necessary to dwell on the moral tendency of such a scheme. It must be abundantly obvious to every mind, which is capable of moral perception. Preach to the sinner that he can do nothing to free himself from wickedness; that if he is ever regenerated, it will be the consequence of an irresistible influence from heaven, which he can neither hasten nor retard; and what better apology can you afford him for continuing in his sin? Nothing could be more unwise in him, than to make any temporal sacrifices for a promised spiritual good. Why should he give up a present gratification, enjoyment, or possession, for any thing in prospect? No present sacrifices can alter his condition, or change future events. If he is one of the chosen, the time will certainly come, when he will be regenerated, and all his sins will be blotted out; if he is not one of the chosen, his doom is fixed, and his wretchedness cannot be aggravated by any wicked excesses,

or criminal pleasures. That man must be a casuist of no ordinary acuteness, who can detect in this doctrine, faithfully represented, any other tendency than to evil and immorality.

As the unconverted are *passive* in this work, they can do nothing till they are moved by the Spirit; and you may be quite sure men will make no vigorous attempts to do what they are persuaded is impossible, particularly when these attempts interfere with their worldly wishes, demand sacrifices, and oppose their inclinations. They will proceed in the road of sin, and the way to ruin, with very little concern, while they feel that they are spell bound, and can turn neither to the right nor to the left, till the kind hand of heaven shall break their chains, take the scales from their eyes, and force them into the path of light, safety, and peace. And after this benevolent deed of heaven is performed, it by no means appears, that all danger is removed. Human nature is not changed. Much room is left to cherish many seeds of no good promise, and to foster the growth of many unpropitious affections, whose fruits will add little to the stock of virtue, or to the ornament of a good life. The very self-complacency, which allows a man to rank himself in a station above his brethren, and to claim in his favour the peculiar agency of his Maker, denotes much of spiritual pride, and but little of that meek and lowly spirit inculcated by the example, doctrines, and commands of our Saviour.

The tendency of a doctrine is best ascertained by

regarding its effects where it has the greatest power of action; and if we trace back the checkered history of the Church, it will present us with little, which we could desire to remember respecting the moral code of those sects, which have made the theory of a miraculous conversion a leading tenet in their belief.*

History also affords a dismal picture of the deplorable effects of this doctrine, in the annals of fanaticism. Men have gone mad in the belief, that their frenzy was the inward workings of the Spirit of God. Next have come murders and rapines, persecutions and tortures, hatred and malice, and every detestable vice, which could disgrace human nature and demoralize society. Keep within the compass of the Reformation, and run through the records of fanaticism from the fratricide of Alphonsus Diaz, to the piteous delusions, which in recent times have bewildered

* The Antinomians make election and irresistible grace the prominent features of their faith. "As the elect," they say, "cannot fall from grace, nor forfeit the divine favour, so it follows, that the wicked actions they commit, and the violations of the divine law, with which they are chargeable, are not *really sinful*, nor are to be considered as instances of their departing from the law of God; and that consequently, they have no occasion either to forsake their sins, or to break them off by repentance." *Mosheim's Church History*, Vol. V. p. 412.

They maintain, that "the elect cannot possibly do any thing displeasing to God, and that consequently no sins, however monstrous, would at all impair or endanger their everlasting blessedness." *Grant's Summary*, Vol. II. p. 499.

Such is the literal import of the doctrine when undisguised and unmixed with others of a more rational and moral nature. That its effects on the morals, when left to have its free and natural tendency, have been most pernicious, will abundantly appear to any one who will be at the trouble of turning to the above references.

the followers of Huntington, Brothers, and Southcott. The madness of Muncer, Stubner and Storck, who kindled a civil war in Germany, sacrificed the lives of many credulous followers, and committed the greatest excesses under pretence of being actuated by a divine impulse ; the wild reveries, which broke out in so many shapes of intolerance and cruelty during the reign of the unfortunate Charles, and the existence of the Commonwealth ; the ravings of Muggleton and Reeves, who declared it to be the unpardonable sin to reject what they called their spiritual message ; the scorching zeal of the Puritans, which was ready to burst out with its consuming fires upon all, who did not profess to seek the Lord under the same influences as themselves,—these facts and events, with numerous others of a similar nature, have been so many practical illustrations of the doctrine of conversion by an irresistible agency of the divine Spirit.

Now we frankly confess we cannot receive a doctrine as coming from God, not a trace of which we can find in the Scriptures, which is so fallacious in the testimony it gives of a divine origin, which is so defective in its practical tendency, and which has actually been made an instrument in bringing down the greatest disorders, evils, and wretchedness upon the church, and upon society. The only authority on which it rests, is the testimony of individuals. And in what does this consist ? It appeals to certain emotions, feelings, and frames of mind, which may come as readily from rational and mechanical, as from spiri-

tual sources. Speaking of the particulars of this testimony, the eloquent James Foster observes, "They give a handle to every wretched enthusiast to impute his ravings, and follies, and wild starts of imagination, to the *spirit of the living God*. And thus they consecrate delusion and imposture, and, if these be of a licentious and impure tendency, enable them with the more ease to extirpate the natural seeds of virtue, and corrupt the morals."*

Compare with this calvinistic doctrine, the means and acts of regeneration, as taught by Unitarians. They believe, that God has made his rational creatures capable of moral goodness by a just use of the qualifications and powers, which he has conferred on them. The commands in scripture to forsake sin, and the injunctions to repentance and holiness, they take to be literal and obligatory. They cannot conceive that God would empower his Son to give to the world rules of right action, and accompany these

* *James Foster's Sermons*, vol. ii. p. 111. The natural effects of this doctrine are not uaptly portrayed by Bishop Hoadly, in what he says of the extent to which some persons pursue the doctrine of Christ's merits as flowing from imputed righteousness, or a satisfaction. Speaking of those, who are mistaken in the terms of divine acceptance, he says, "They are all such as, (though they do not say it and speak it aloud, in so many words, yet,) think and speak in such a manner of the merits of Christ's sufferings, and the imputation of his personal holiness to believers, as to make his moral laws of none effect, and to render all virtue in Christians a poor, insignificant, unnecessary matter ; unless it be the great virtue of applying the merits of Christ to ourselves, a virtue, which they who have most spirits are most frequently observed to be masters of, and which hath been too often seen to be founded upon the greatest degree of confidence and the greatest degree of guilt, mixed and tempered together by a strong fancy and imagination." *Hoadly on the Terms of Acceptance with God*, p. 77.

rules with promises and threatenings, with exhortations and commands, unless they were addressed to beings, who can be influenced by these motives, and daily and hourly render an entire obedience. The whole body of gospel precepts would be without meaning and value, on any other supposition. Repentance, obedience, and holiness are the conditions of eternal life, with which the rules of the Gospel, strictly observed, enable every human being to comply. Unitarian preachers, therefore, think it their duty to enforce the necessity of these conditions, and not to preach to sinners, that, by any "covenant," salvation is ensured "without condition." The work of regeneration, to be scriptural and sound, they think should be going on every day. It is the business of life, and should not be forgotten, or neglected, amidst the busiest scenes of our temporal avocations and duties.

In this work they believe the Spirit of God aids and guides, encourages and strengthens. Its influence is efficient or ineffectual according to the disposition of every individual, and the efforts which are made to resist evil and conform to the laws of virtue. God is always present with his Spirit to assist those, who ask his favour, and who will profit by his counsels. He does not act upon them with a power, which they cannot oppose. This would be destroying moral freedom, and rendering the rules and motives of the Gospel unnecessary and inoperative.

Many things conspire to produce the change of regeneration, or a thorough renewal of heart and cha-

racter. Means are used here as in every thing else. The moral discipline, to which all persons are subjected, constitutes a very large part of these means. Every occurrence in life, which makes the sinner reflect on the frail tenure of his existence, his dependence on God, the evil of sin, and the danger of a wicked course, contributes something to the work of reformation. Whatever calms the passions, warms the affections, exalts and purifies the character, or promotes goodness in any way, has the same tendency. Hence the advantage of preaching the word, diffusing a knowledge of the Scriptures, and establishing and supporting good institutions; all of which would be unnecessary, if men are to be regenerated, or brought into a state of holiness, by the immediate influence, or irresistible impulse of divine power. Unitarians believe, and preach, that "without holiness no man shall see the Lord," and in consistency with this belief, they exhort all men to embrace the conditions of the Gospel by a constant observance of its laws, unceasing piety, and rigid virtue.

In addition to what has been said above, respecting the influence of the Holy Spirit, the following, from a work of high authority and just celebrity, may probably be considered as expressing the views of Unitarians generally. "They do not reject the notion of a direct and immediate influence of the Spirit of God on the human mind. They believe, that there may be circumstances of great trial, strong temptation, and peculiar difficulty, that call for extraordinary assistance, and that those, who have mani-

fested a disposition to make a good use of the ordinary means afforded, will have further aid suited to their exigences, and sufficient by a proper use to answer to their necessities. They suppose, also, that extraordinary assistance will be granted only to those, who ask it; that it will be granted to previous good disposition, and a sense of need and dependence,—that God will give the Holy Spirit to them who ask, to them who have already right feelings, are sensible of their weakness and wants, and ask the mercy of God to supply them.”*

From what has been said, it is to be inferred that Unitarians differ from Calvinists not in the *object to be attained* by conversion, but respecting the *manner* by which it is attained. Unitarians hold to a divine influence, and that men are converted by this influence, but they do not believe it to be irresistible, or miraculous. They conceive that God is always ready to second their good intentions and purposes, to aid their virtuous efforts, listen to their prayers, show mercy to the penitent, and to pardon their sins when repented of and forsaken. They believe conversion to be the work of God, not in the way of an arbitrary, irresistible agency, but by the innumerable motives and inducements, which he employs to bring men to a just sense of their duty, a deep reverence of his character, love of his laws, and a habitual desire for purity of mind, and holiness of life. Whatever leads to these results, may be considered as pro-

* Dr. Ware’s Address to Trinitarians and Calvinists, p. 124.

ceeding from the Spirit of God. This Spirit may operate through good instructions, or any thing, in fact, which disposes the mind to thoughtfulness and serious inquiry. Sudden and deep afflictions, an impressive sermon, certain passages in the word of God, may, by the agency of the divine Spirit, be brought down upon the soul with a power, which will terminate in conversion, by opening the eyes of men to their true character, and causing them to see the folly and danger of sin. But in these operations, there is no force nor compulsion; nothing which may not be resisted, and which is not resisted by all, who, under the same circumstances, receive no impression.

This is consistent with the scripture view of the subject. Conversion is never represented there as coming from an irresistible act of divine power, or as being brought about in consequence of a divine decree. We are told "grieve not the Spirit of God." But why thus told, unless the Spirit may be grieved, or resisted? "Repent ye, therefore, and be converted," says the Apostle. But why this command, if we have not power to obey it, and are to be *passive*, till it shall please God to raise us up by a miracle? St. Paul's conversion was miraculous, and is the most remarkable one recorded in scripture, and yet, in his speech before Agrippa, he says, that he "was not *disobedient* to the heavenly vision," intimating, as a learned writer has observed, that his freedom of choice was not restrained, but that his conversion was on his part an act of voluntary obedience and virtue.

Such are the comparative views of the doctrine of

conversion, or regeneration, as held by Calvinists and Unitarians. Which are the most rational and scriptural, which the most likely to secure good morals and christian piety, let the impartial and reflecting judge.

LETTER III.

Calvinistic Doctrines of Election, Particular Redemption, and Perseverance, as influencing Piety and Morals.

SIR,

THE doctrine of *divine decrees*, in point of order and dignity, is the first in the calvinistic circle. That “God from all eternity ordained whatsoever comes to pass,” is the primary article in Calvin’s creed, and I suppose in the creed of all his true followers. It is the groundwork of this system, that the predetermination, or arbitrary appointment, of the Creator, extends to every event and change, which could possibly take place either in the physical or moral creation.

At present I am only to remark on that branch of this doctrine, known by the popular name of *election*, or *predestination*, and which relates to the destiny of man. According to Calvinism, God determined from the beginning to create man with such

infirmities, and expose him to such trials, that he should by divine appointment become a being totally depraved, or infinitely wicked, cherishing an irreconcilable enmity to his Maker, without either the disposition or the power to return to obedience and holiness. This was a general decree, reaching to all mankind. How then could any be restored to divine favour, which all had forfeited by the necessary conditions of existence? How could any be saved? This was brought about by another determination of the supreme will, called the *decree of election*, by which it was ordained, that a certain number of the human race should be released from the bondage imposed on them by the general decree, and be made the children of God's mercy forever. This doctrine is so clearly expressed by its asserters, that no language can render it better understood than their own.

Calvin speaks as follows. "Predestination we call the eternal decree of God, by which he hath determined in himself, what he would have become of every individual of mankind."* And he adds immediately after; "They are not all created with an equal condition, but to some eternal life is foreordained, and to others eternal damnation. Since, therefore, every man is destined to one or the other of these ends, we say he is predestinated either to life or to death."† The members of the West-

* Instit. B. III. Chap. XXI. § 5.

† Non enim pari conditione creantur omnes; sed aliis vita aeterna, aliis damnatio aeterna praeordinatur. Itaque, prout in alterutrum finem quisque conditus est, ita vel ad vitam, vel ad mortem praedestinatum dicimus. *Ibid.*

minster Assembly were even more explicit. "By the decree of God," say they, "for the manifestation of his glory, some men and angels are predestinated unto everlasting life, and others foreordained to everlasting death.—Neither are any others redeemed by Christ, effectually called, justified, adopted, sanctified, and saved, but the elect only; the rest of mankind God was pleased, according to the unsearchable counsel of his own will, to pass by, and to ordain them to dishonour and wrath for their sin, to the praise of his glorious justice."* And to show, that this predestination originated wholly in the arbitrary will of the Deity, without regard to the actions or goodness of the beings to whom it applies, we are assured, that the election was established "without any foresight of faith, or good works, or perseverance in either of them, or any other thing in the creature, as conditions, or causes moving him thereunto."†

Such is the leading tenet of Calvinism; all mankind are totally depraved, and naturally under God's wrath and curse; they can only be rescued by the atoning sacrifice of Christ; and this sacrifice, although made by an "*Almighty surety,*" is sufficient for *the elect only*. This is the *essence* of Calvinism; take away election, and there is no certainty that any will be saved; take this away, and Calvinism falls to the ground; I mean that Calvinism, which Calvin preached, which is set forth in the Confession of Faith, and adopted by the Presbyterian Church.

* Confession of Faith, Chap. III. § 3. 6. 7.

† Ibid. § 5.

Without saying one word concerning the truth of this doctrine, let us turn our thoughts for a moment to its characteristics and tendency. In what light does it represent the Deity? And what encouragement does it afford to piety, love and obedience in men? The answer to these questions is so extremely obvious, that a few short hints will be sufficient.

In the first place, it takes away every vestige of the divine goodness, which is the fountain of all the moral attributes in God, as well as the primary cause of the moral nature and duties of man. That God is *no respecter of persons*, but regards all his creatures with the same parental tenderness, is the great cause why they owe him submission, gratitude, praise, and devotion. The scheme of predestination annihilates this holiest of his attributes, and clothes him with the habiliments of a partial, capricious Being, a *respecter of persons*, showering blessings on a certain selected portion of his creatures, and entailing endless misery on the rest, without reference to any thing they have done, or could do. Light and darkness are not more opposite, than are the traits of such a character to the perfections of a God of infinite goodness.

Again, if God creates wicked natures in men, or what is precisely the same thing, if he so creates men that they are obliged to sin, or decrees from all eternity that they shall sin, and then punishes them for their guilt, he becomes literally the author of sin, and inflicts punishments for deeds, which he made it necessary to commit. If men are reprobate

by the appointment of God, they are so by a law, which it would be rebellion in them to resist; and if he has decreed, that all their thoughts and actions shall be wicked, they sin against divine law whenever they think a good thought, or perform a virtuous act. This is what is meant, I suppose, when we are told, that the prayers of the unregenerate are an abomination in the sight of God. It is because he has willed, that they shall be wicked, and prayer is an attempt at holiness in opposition to his will. This is perfectly consistent with the doctrine, and proves God to be the author of sin, although he threatens a terrible punishment on the offender.

I know it has been said by some, who are willing to sacrifice consistency to a show of reason, that God does not act with compulsion over the nonelect; he simply passes them by, and permits them to be ruined. He decrees salvation to some, and does not prevent the remainder from perishing. This sophistry is too shallow to merit a serious reply, and only shows the embarrassments in which the friends of the doctrine are involved, when they would reconcile it with the attributes of God, and the common sense of mankind. Calvin is more bold and consistent. He declares that whom God passes by he reprobates; *quos Deus praeterit reprobat.* The divine will and character are equally concerned in the decree of salvation to some, and of perdition to others, and God is just as much the author of the sins by which the wicked are condemned, as he is of the means by which the righteous are saved.

This scheme, also, represents God as acting an insincere part. He commands men to obey his laws, threatens punishment to disobedience, calls to repentance, and promises pardon to such as will listen; and all this at the same time that he has foreordained the ruin of the very creatures whom he thus endeavours to influence by motives! Is it said, that he speaks to the elect only, in the precepts, admonitions, commands, and encouragements of his word? This removes no difficulty. Why threaten or persuade the elect? Their destiny is fixed, and to threaten them with punishment or proclaim the necessity of repentance, is deception. The case is aggravated when applied to the reprobate. To preach repentance and a promise of pardon to them, is not only a cruel deception, but a mocking of their wretchedness.

If all acts and dispositions are decreed, men are not moral agents, nor accountable beings. Why then should they be judged by laws, which they have no power to obey? God has declared, that he will judge all men according to their deeds, but such a judgment, on the principles of election and reprobation, would be an excess of injustice, a refinement of cruelty, which can be supposed to exist only in a being, who delights to practise evil, and inflict misery.

With such views of the everlasting God, as this doctrine presents to us, where shall the mind seek for motives of piety? In alluding to this subject, Tillotson has well observed, that "Men cannot easily have a blacker thought of God, than to imagine that he hath, from all eternity, carried on a secret

design to circumvent the greatest part of men into destruction, and underhand to draw men into a plot against heaven, that by this unworthy practice he may raise a revenue of glory to his justice. Shall we attribute that to the best Being in the world, which we would detest and abominate in ourselves."* What is left in such a Being to praise, adore, love, or imitate? Whoever would make the notion of election and reprobation a ruling principle of his devotions, can have no other feelings than those of dread and horror of a Being, who delights to bestow torments and misery on those, to whom he has given no ability to gain his favour, and no power to escape the fury of his wrath. Love and reverence cannot mingle with such devotions; never can the humbled transgressor lift to heaven the eye of contrition, and plead for the mercy of a compassionate Father; the voice of praise will sound in vain, and the tears of penitence will flow unheeded. Heaven and earth, man and nature, the past and the future, are all bound in the indissoluble chains of destiny. The decrees of God are not to be broken, and he has ordained happiness to a part, and wretched-

* Tillotson's Sermons, Vol. VIII, p. 3408.

On another occasion Tillotson says;

"The doctrine of absolute reprobation is no part of the doctrine of the holy Scriptures, that ever I could find; and there's the rule of our faith. If some great divines have held this doctrine not in opposition to the goodness of God, but hoping they may be reconciled together, let them do it if they can; but if they cannot, rather let the schools of the greatest divines be called in question, than the goodness of God, which, next to his being, is the greatest and clearest truth in the world." *Ibid. Vol. VIII, p. 3564.*

ness to the remainder. Prayers will avail nothing, and why should they be wasted? Towards such a Being, no incense of piety can arise from the virtuous heart; and if it could, it would be an unmeaning, vain, and useless oblation.

It will be seen, also, that, the doctrine has not a better tendency to promote the personal virtues, and regulate the conduct of men towards each other. Whoever can summon so much self assurance as to rank himself among the elect, who are favoured of God infinitely above the great mass of his fellow creatures, must have a stronger control over the predominant feelings of human nature than is generally exhibited, not sometimes to let his spiritual pride shoot above his surrounding virtues, and to look with a compassion approaching contempt on the unfortunate outcasts, thus forever excluded from the mercy of their Maker.

Nor can it be thought very strange that such persons should imagine little respect, or comity, or affection due from them to that degraded portion of their race, whom God himself has plunged into a gulf of perdition, even beyond the reach of infinite mercy. Would it be the part of duty, nay, would it not be an indignity to the great Jehovah, to regard with complacency the beings on whom he has denounced an irrevocable curse? Such must certainly be the feelings of a person, who believes he has been redeemed from all iniquity by the merits of Christ, and that much the larger part of mankind are reprobates. Ought he to love those, whom God will never love,

but has consigned to torments unutterable and extinguishable? It is presumed, that most of those who sincerely believe this doctrine, as sincerely believe themselves to be among the chosen few, the only accepted; but the records of passing events will testify that the number is not small, who have been driven to distraction with the haunting fear that they were not among the elect, and ended their days by their own hands, the miserable victims of delusion and despair. In either of the above results, this doctrine proves itself a treacherous guardian of morals and christian duty.

Besides, what has the sinner to fear? If he believes his sins to be predetermined, and acts according to this faith, he will consider sin as much a duty, as any virtuous act. To do what God requires, is a duty of the highest obligation; and let men once be persuaded, that all thoughts and acts are duties, because decreed, or that no course of action will alter their future destiny, which was fixed from eternity, and we shall have no occasion to ask how it will affect the state of morals. Yet, let it be repeated, the doctrine of election and reprobation, carried into practice, will leave the sinner at liberty to follow his worst inclinations under a belief, that he is in the way of his duty, and doing all to the glory of God.

In the tendency of this point of orthodoxy to excite high thoughts of one's self, and low thoughts of one's brethren, it may be we have revealed to us the reason why some christians arrogate so much to themselves, raise so high the tone of authority, claim

the praise of peculiar strictness and sanctity, talk magisterially of the essentials of religion, place themselves in the judgment seat, and assume the prerogative of their Master, in deciding who are and who are not christians; I say, it may be, that conduct like this is no more than the natural effect of a consciousness of being one of the elect, and of being thus qualified to take the work of the Saviour out of his hands, and to go about the invidious task of separating the wheat from the tares, the sheep from the goats; for it is difficult to realize how any one, who looks upon himself as fallible like other mortals, and as formed in the same mould of humanity, could give way to such a spirit, or suffer himself to be deluded into assumptions so extravagant. Whether this conjecture be well founded or not, it will not be denied, that a very intimate connexion apparently exists between such a faith and such a conduct; and a very little inquiry will be enough to make it manifest, that this has often been something more than a seeming alliance. All this may be true, perhaps, and still no just reflections can be cast on persons, but on principles. It is hard if a man cannot be permitted to act up to his faith. Certainly it is, but then he must be responsible for the lengths to which his faith leads him, especially if he is driven to overleap the bounds of decorum, charity, and the commonest christian virtues. Practical principles, or rather principles reduced to practice, make the character; and all that is asked of the reader in the present instance is, that he will connect one with the other, and judge for

himself whether the order and harmony of things be violated. Let not this consequence be charged on election, if it can be ascribed to a more probable cause.*

We have seen, that the *doctrine of election* is the keystone of Calvinism. It was the great topic of discussion at the Synod of Dort, and we may perhaps say, it was the sole cause of that Synod being convened. The growing heresy of Arminius consisted in asserting the *free will* of man, and the *free*

* In the whole compass of theological tactics, there are few things more curious than the twenty-third Chapter of the third Book of Calvin's Institutes, in which he attempts to confute the objections, or as he calls them, the "calumnies," against the doctrine of election. The objections are generally stated by him with considerable fairness, but in his replies, he indulges to an uncommon degree his usual testiness and ill humour. Where he has not a good argument at hand, he never fails to be ready with a sneer, a malediction, or a copious discharge of hard names.

He finds it a much easier matter to charge his opponents with advancing arguments "puerile and absurd," than to undertake a demonstration. Even when he cannot argue, he can talk flippantly of the "intolerable petulance of men," "the audaciousness of the impious," "the petulance and murmurs of impiety," and will tell you that his favourite doctrine is "maliciously and impudently calumniated." And when this kind of logic becomes too bald even for himself, he thinks all safe if he can take refuge under the wing of Augustine. The name of this good Father is his talisman, with which he works wonders unheard of before or since in the legends of scholastic necromancy.

It may not be amiss to give a specimen of his reasoning. He states an objection as follows; "The reprobate wish to be thought excusable in sinning, because they cannot avoid the necessity of sinning; especially since this necessity is laid upon them by the ordination of God." Here is an objection, that goes to the very bottom of his doctrine. Observe how he answers it. "But we deny this to be a just excuse; because the ordination of God, by which they complain that they are destined to destruction, is guided by equity, *unknown indeed to us*, but indubitably certain." *Institutes, B. iii. C. xxiii. § 9.* Here he builds his whole argument upon a thing which he acknowledges to be "unknown," but which is, nevertheless, "indubitably certain." A more palpable and illustrious example of the *argumentum baculinum* could not have been devised by Peter Ramus himself.

grace of God, in opposition to the notion of an absolute predestination. In this heresy the Calvinists saw the ruin of their whole fabric. Hence the *five points*, established by a vote of the Synod of Dort; which may all be resolved into the one point of *election*, for this is the beginning and the end, the form and the substance of all the others.

Since this is so vital a doctrine in the calvinistic faith, it is surely a little surprising, that not a glimpse of it is discovered in your Sermon and Reply; nor is it even hinted at in your repeated enumerations of *essential* doctrines. If there be an article of belief more essential than any other, in the system which you defend, it is this; if there be one, the denial of which should be a forfeiture of the christian name in the mind of a consistent Calvinist, it is this; for it is the supporting pillar of the calvinistic scheme of christianity. How it should so completely escape your notice, at a time when it would seem to claim the very first place, it might be fruitless to inquire.

Did this neglect arise from accident, oversight, or a reluctance to enforce a tenet, which has become so

He brings forward as another objection, which is urged against predestination, that if the fate of men is fixed by an immutable decree, they can have no room for solicitude about their conduct in this life. To this he replies, "And truly this objection is not altogether destitute of truth; for there are many swine, who bespatter the doctrine of predestination with these impure blasphemies, and with this pretext elude all admonitions and reproofs." And again; "They carry their blasphemies much farther, by asserting, that any one who is reprobated by God will labour to no purpose, if he endeavour to approve himself to him by innocence and integrity of life; but here they are convicted of a most impudent falsehood." *Ibid.* ¶ 12. This language Calvin calls argument.

unpopular as not to be readily received ? It is no uncommon thing, indeed, for professed Calvinists to declare themselves much aggrieved, when this doctrine is reckoned among the articles of their faith. This is a good omen. It testifies to the progress of truth, and the inefficiency of all human inventions which do violence to the understanding of men. When a professor in one Calvinistic Theological Seminary rejects the doctrine of *imputed sin*,* and a professor in another thinks it prudent to *keep out of sight* the most important tenet of his faith, there is much good ground for hope, that the light of truth, which is thus breaking out of darkness, will continue to multiply and extend its beams.†

* Professor Woods, of Andover, says, “The *imputation of Adam’s sin to his posterity*, in any sense, which those words naturally and properly convey, is a doctrine, *which we do not believe*.” But listen to the Assembly of Divines.—“Our first parents being the root of all mankind, *the guilt of their sin was imputed*, and the same death in sin and corrupted nature *conveyed to all their posterity*.” Confession of Faith, Chap. vi. It cannot be denied, that the Andover School has greatly improved upon this doctrine.

† It is very true, the founders of the Princeton Seminary have done what they could to guard against any such consequence. They have raised as strong barriers as possible against every thing like improvement, and closed most effectually every opening through which a single additional ray of light could penetrate. The Theological Professor, when he enters on his duties, it seems, is obliged to subscribe the following declaration, namely, “I do solemnly promise and engage, not to inculcate, teach, or insinuate, any thing which shall appear to me to contradict or contravene, either directly or impliedly, any thing taught in the Confession of Faith, or Catechisms of the Presbyterian Church.” *Assembly’s Digest*, p. 247. A professor at Princeton, therefore, can never change his mind in regard to any of his theological sentiments, without a hypocritical concealment of his opinions, or a violation of his oath, in “teaching, inculcating, or insinuating” something, which he did not originally believe. This is the genuine spirit of the dark ages, and the most sagacious scheme that could be devised to perpetuate ignorance and error.

Two more points of Calvinism still remain, but so intimately connected with election, and their moral tendency so nearly the same, that little needs be added concerning them.

The first of these is *particular redemption*, which teaches that Christ died for a specified number of the human race, and that the efficacy of his redeeming power could extend only to this elect number. After the decree of reprobation, it is certain, that none coming under this decree could be saved; but how it happens, that Christ, whose sacrifice was infinite, should not have power to redeem all mankind, or how it happens, that an infinite sacrifice should not embrace them all, has never been explained. Divines tell us of a covenant; but they have never proved, that the goodness of God was extinct, or that there ever was a time, when he loved a certain portion of his creatures, and hated all the rest; which they must prove, before they can make this notion of particular redemption intelligible. We are not now concerned, however, with any thing more than the doctrine itself, as held by the Calvinists. Into its reasons we shall not inquire. Let it suffice, that it considers every thing, which Christ has taught and done, his instructions, revelations, death, and sufferings, as having no value for any other persons than the elect.

All the remaining portion of mankind are in the same condition, as if he had never come into the world, nor taken on him the office of a redeemer.

If this be true, no benefit has resulted from the mission of Christ. The elect were already saved

by a divine decree, and if he came only for their advantage, he accomplished nothing.

Since the coming of Christ has not altered the condition of men, nor provided a method by which it can be altered, why should any believe in him as a redeemer and Saviour? In fact, such a faith would be false. If salvation has been decreed to the elect, he is no Saviour to them; and to the reprobate he is not a Saviour, for they cannot be saved. Where will this end, but in the destruction of the Gospel system, and of every motive to holiness which it supplies?

The doctrine of *perseverance* assures us, that the elect, after they have been visited by the efficacious and regenerating grace of God made certain by a decree, will never lose this grace, nor be in danger of so far deviating from the way of holiness as to put their salvation in jeopardy. They must be saved in defiance of themselves. This is no more than a consequence of election, and has the same ruinous tendency on morals and religious obligation.

What has the regenerate man to do, but yield without compunction to any wickedness to which his concupiscence, avarice, malice, or other passions and propensities shall prompt him? If conscience chides, what power will conscience have, while he is sure, that no evil can befall him at last? He is elected, and the God of heaven will not circumvent his own determined purpose. Sin and holiness are the same to a man, who is among the elect; they will equally carry him through, and make him an instrument in

aiding the designs of providence, and advancing the glory of God.

Again, in this course of *perseverance*, what concern have the elect with rules of action, principles of morals, the laws of society, and those wholesome restraints imposed to keep up harmony and peace among men? As far as these redound to their convenience, it may be thought advisable to regard them, but no farther; and not even to this extent from any sense of moral obligation. Men may form systems of ethics, talk of virtue, construct wise laws, confide in the moral sense, and thus hope to curb the licentious and passionate; but all these will be shadowy things in the eyes of the elect. They are under a law superior to any human fabrication; they are shielded by the promise and power of God; they have a more dignified calling than the mass of groveling mortals; they are chosen vessels, never to be broken; children of light; heirs of an inheritance, which no changes of time or of eternity can render uncertain.

We need not stop with the laws of men, and human principles of right and goodness. In what respect are such favoured beings concerned with the laws of God, the precepts of scripture, the commands of Christ? The decree of *perseverance* has no conditions. It is not said, be humble, repent, obey, love God, love your neighbour, and then you will be able to persevere. It is a main part of the scheme, that it is not encumbered with conditions. Hence the Gospel rules are useless, the Bible might be blotted from existence without loss to the elect; and in-

deed, according to this plan, the christian dispensation itself is only a theatrical exhibition acted over as it was resolved on before the foundation of the world, raising the curiosity and admiration of mortals, but not producing any effect on their character and destiny.

I have dwelt on this topic longer than its real importance demands : The individuals are very few at this period, who believe in the calvinistic doctrine of election, as contained in creeds, and taught by school divines ; and the number is vastly smaller, who would undertake to defend it on its original grounds. It comes out of the hands of later writers modified, softened, and moulded into such shapes, as would never be recognized by the warm divines, who pleaded its cause so manfully at the Synod of Dort. They would see only the caricature of its former glory, and be grieved, that it should suffer more from the treachery of friends, than it would have done in their day from the open hostility of enemies. The truth is, it will not bear softening ; to modify, is to destroy it ; whoever applies himself to this task, deserts the field of Calvinism ; he may retain the name, but he has nothing else ; let him remove this one stone, and his tower of strength is fallen ; he may feed his eyes with the vision of its former grandeur, but it will never again afford him a resting place. A moderate Calvinist is no Calvinist.

If the ingenuity of man were put to its utmost stretch, I presume it would be impossible to invent another doctrine so perfectly at variance with the at-

tributes of God, and the reason of man, as this of election and reprobation. Suppose the Deity to be infinitely evil, instead of infinitely good, and his character to be in all respects directly opposite to what it really is, and you might then show a consistency between this doctrine, and the attributes of his nature. However this tenet may seem to others, I cannot resist the conviction, that with its various appendages and outworks of total depravity, human inability, and compulsory grace, it is the most immoral and pernicious, which has ever been started as a doctrine of christianity. Its mischief is extensive, and that it is not more so, is because it is never made a ruling principle of action, nor believed except in a modified sense, and in connexion with other doctrines, which serve as a counterpoise to its perverting tendency.

LETTER IV.

Testimony of History to the Influence of Calvinism.

SIR,

You stated in your Sermon, that the positions you had taken could easily be illustrated and confirmed by tracing the history of American Unitarianism. You were desired to trace this history, and compare it with a similar historical view of Presbyterianism, and let the world see by a fair parallel in what respects Unitarians have fallen so immensely behind their brethren in morals and piety, as to be ranked among Mohammedans and Jews, and not to deserve the name of Christians.

With this most reasonable request you did not think it expedient to comply. "I do not intend," you observe, "to follow this gentleman far, in the comparison, which he so zealously and confidently urges, between Presbyterians and Unitarians, on the score of purity of morals." That is, you decline to make the comparison by which alone the accuracy of your very serious charges can be tested. The question is, whether Unitarians are less moral as a sect, than other sects. This question must be decided, if decided at all, by facts and a comparison. You have answered it in the affirmative, but without proof. Those, who come under your censure, do not approve

the tribunal before which they have been arraigned, and, as they recognize no Inquisition, they think it a duty, and claim the privilege to protest against your decision. They believe you to have gone on false premises, and would have you review your ground, and at all events give the public a detail of the facts and reasons, by which you felt yourself bound to reveal to the world the moral disability, the practical irreligion, and licentious habits of Unitarians.

Nothing more was asked, than what you had said might easily be done, namely, to let the voice of history speak in your behalf. Turn to actual events, and not to speculative theories, to the moral condition and progress of society, and not to an imaginary tendency of opinions. Examine the history of Unitarianism with minuteness and severity; trace its advancement through every channel; bring to the light of open day the secret mischiefs, which it has been working; let the lineaments of immorality with which you aver it to be so odiously disfigured, be exhibited in their boldest relief; in short, give a *true* picture, as highly wrought as you please, and then place it by the side of a similar sketch of Presbyterianism, and I venture to affirm, that no Unitarian will desire to have his cause presented in a more favourable light, or wish the public to possess a better confutation of your charges. Such an examination is the only possible mode in which a charge of practical immorality can be substantiated.

You not only appeal to the records of past times as a witness against Unitarians, but call on them to

bear testimony to the good effects of Calvinism. You express yourself in the following language. "Now I appeal to all impartial readers, who have the least knowledge of ecclesiastical history, whether those who have embraced the general system of christian doctrine, designated by the name of Calvinism, have not been in all ages distinguished as '*the stricter sort*' of professing christians? Have they not always been reproached by the laxer classes as 'austere,' 'puritanical,' and enemies of even many 'innocent indulgencies?'" An appeal so formal and confident cannot be met with more fairness, I presume, than by bringing distinctly before us some of the prominent particulars to which it refers. A small number must suffice, but they shall be such as have marked the strong features of Calvinism.

Let us begin with the founder of this system. What does history report respecting the influence of his principles on his own mind, temper, and character? Has there ever been a more violent or unrighteous persecutor than Calvin? What page of history is stained with darker blots, than those which narrate some of the events of his life? Look at his violent abuse and cruel persecutions of his friend Castalio, a man of great learning, moderation, and piety, against whom he uttered the grossest language, and procured a decree of banishment for no other reason, than that he had the independence to assert and maintain opinions, which differed from his own. The unfortunate, though less worthy, Bolsec shared a similar fate. Every one, indeed, who presumed to doubt his infal-

libility, whether friend or foe, was made to feel the effects of his turbulent passions. But the darkest and deepest stigma on his character, was his treatment of Servetus, and it is one, which his ardent admirers have laboured with total want of success to remove, or even to diminish. Servetus had for many years been his confidential friend and correspondent. He could not subscribe the creed of Calvin, and as Calvin could not convince him by argument and persuasion, he resorted to stronger means. He accused him of heresy, procured his imprisonment, commenced against him a criminal process, and was thus the original and chief cause of his sentence of death, and his murder at the stake. He afterwards declared his warmest approbation of this event in letters to his friends, and expressed himself in the most intemperate language. Even in his commentaries on the Bible, he calls Servetus a "profligate fellow, a knave, and an obscene dog."*

* The rage of Calvin seems first to have been excited on account of certain questions in theology, which Servetus had proposed to him, but which Calvin did not answer to his satisfaction. Calvin could not bear opposition, and Servetus was not to be convinced without a reason. One of the unworthy acts of Calvin in procuring his condemnation, was the producing of a manuscript at his trial, which Servetus had sent to him long before for his examination and judgment, but which had never been printed.

To show the spirit with which he meditated and prosecuted this business, it is enough to quote what he said in a letter, which Bolsec and Grotius saw in the original, "that if this *heretic* should fall into his hands, he would order it so, that it should cost him his life." And after the unholy act was done, he boasted of "having exterminated Michael Servetus the Spaniard."

The authority for these facts, and others equally disgraceful, may be seen in a very circumstantial and interesting account of the life, writings, and death of Servetus, contained in the *Monthly Repository*, vol. i. and v. See also the *Cambridge General Repository*, vol. iii.; *Wright's History of Persecutions*, p. 345; *Mosheim*, vol. iv. p. 433, 488.

Such was the character of him, who first matured and embodied the doctrines, which now go under his name. Do these historical facts argue much in favour of the moral tendency of the principles you defend? Calvin was the more inexcusable, as he had himself deserted the church of Rome, and professed to be an advocate for free inquiry. It is certainly unfortunate for your appeal to history, that few names have descended to posterity, bearing feebler testimony of the persons to whom they belonged having been under the purifying influence of religious principles, than that of Calvin.

The commotions in Holland, which preceded and followed the Synod of Dort, and which brought the virtuous and inflexible patriot, Oldenbarneveldt, to the block, and consigned the illustrious Grotius to perpetual imprisonment, were excited by the Calvinists. The spirit of intolerance, which arose to so fervent a heat in Calvin, raged at this period with scarcely less violence in his followers. The Arminians had struck out of their creed the doctrine of absolute decrees, because they could neither find it in the Scriptures, nor believe it. This was the offence that kindled a flame of persecution in the Calvinists, which lasted for years, drove many of the Arminians into exile, immured others in prisons, silenced their preachers, suppressed their religious assemblies, and inflicted universally every species of severity. Even at the Synod of Dort, which was pretended to be summoned for the purpose of a mutual conference, the Arminians were treated as heretics,

and rudely denied the privilege of explaining and defending their sentiments. They were dealt with as criminals, and condemned as such.

The history of Holland during these disastrous times affords the most striking illustration of the influence of calvinistic principles, when allowed to act without opposition. The Calvinists were the stronger party; they professed to act wholly from motives of religion; and all the enormities practised on their opponents are justly ascribed to this source.*

It will not be easy, perhaps, to trace the effects of Calvinism with much precision in England. Civil and religious causes have been so much blended in that country since the origin of Calvinism, as to render it a difficult task to distinguish between them. What with the puritans, the favourers of the English Prelacy, and of Papacy, during the high commotions of church and state, it is impossible to tell how much should be put to the account of selfishness, party zeal, bigotry, the tendency of bad principles, or of a correct faith, and genuine piety. One thing, however, amidst this chaos of uncertainty, stands forth prominent and indisputable. When the Calvinists had dominion, they showed a spirit of intolerance not a whit inferior to that of their Genevan master, or their brethren at Dort. Witness the ordinance of the Presbyterian parliament against heresy, in which

* See Mosheim's *Church History*, vol. v. chap. 3. *North American Review*, vol. vi. p. 185. Oldenbarneveldt opposed the convocation of the Synod of Dort, and maintained, that the States-General had no authority on matters of religion. See MacLaine's Note in Mosheim's *History*, vol. v. p. 451.

it was decreed, that any one, who should be guilty of certain *opinions*, which were defined and declared to be heretical, “*should suffer the pains of death, as in case of felony, without benefit of clergy.*”* This was walking in the precise steps of Calvin. It is a case of importance, because it discovers the feelings of the most intelligent and influential men among the Calvinists, and is thus an accurate index to the impressions and inclinations of the less informed multitude.

It is hardly necessary to call your mind to the first settlers of New-England. The odious effects of their intolerance and persecutions are not to be forgotten by any one, who has looked at the history of those times. For the honour of religion, and even of humanity, we should be willing to have them forgotten. But when appealing to history for the influence of certain doctrines, justice and truth demand a fair report. The laws made against the heresies of Quakers by the early colonists were, if possible, more inhuman than those of the Presbyterian parliament. They were rigorously put in execution, and in several instances the punishment of

* This act was passed May 2, 1648. Neal says, “This was one of the most shocking laws I have met with, and shows that the governing Presbyterians of these times would have made a terrible use of their power, if it had been supported by the sword of the civil magistrate.” *Neal’s History*, vol. iii. p. 497. Among the heresies which were to be punished with death, was the denying, “That Christ is not God equal with the Father,—or that the Godhead and Manhood are distinct natures.” Imprisonment was threatened to such as maintained, “That man by nature hath free will to turn to God,—that the soul of man sleeps, when the body is dead,—that man is bound to believe no more than by his reason he can comprehend.” *Ibid.*

death was actually inflicted.* The first Baptists, who came into the country, were also treated with great severity, and punished in various ways for their heresy. Now the persons, who ran into these excesses, were Calvinists of "the stricter sort," who embraced the dogmas of this faith in their fullest extent, and even while committing these outrages against the laws of our common nature, imagined themselves acting under the imperious guidance of their religious principles.

Such is the influence of Calvinism as testified by history. How far your appeal proves favourable to your position, let the impartial decide. The particulars here selected are leading features in the history of Calvinism; and it is remarkable, that where the principles of this faith have been most prevalent, and met with least opposition, their evil effects have been most severely felt. In Geneva, where nearly all were Calvinists, Castalio, Bolsec,

* "The Quakers," says Belknap, "were at first banished, but this proving insufficient, a succession of sanguinary laws was enacted against them, of which imprisonment, whipping, cutting off the ears, boring the tongue with a hot iron, and banishment on pain of death, were the terrible sanctions." *History of New Hampshire*, vol. i. p. 90. For some curious remarks on this subject, and a further confirmation of what is here said, See *Mather's Magnalia Christi*, Book vii. c. 4.

"The Presbyterians," says Mr. Gray, "called toleration a hideous monster, the great Diana of the Independents." *Bamp. Lee.* p. 284, as quoted in Adam's *Religious World Displayed*, Vol. III. p. 68. We know, also, that forty years ago the suspicions of the public were so strong against the toleration of Presbyterians, that the Synod of New York and Philadelphia thought it necessary, "solemnly and publicly to declare, that they ever have, and still do, renounce and abhor the principles of intolerance." *Assembly's Digest*, p. 337.

and others were banished, and Servetus was murdered; in Holland, where opposition was stronger, and the influence of milder principles had some weight, the tide of persecution ran with less violence; in England, for similar reasons, its violence was still less, not theoretically, but practically, not in default of inclination, but of power, and of public countenance; in New-England, the scenes of Geneva were again acted over, because all were Calvinists, and the natural asperity of their sentiments was not softened by intercourse with others, whose views were more rational and temperate.

I might examine your appeal to history in another light, and make some inquiries into the historical grounds on which you boast of the epithets, *strict*, *austere*, and *puritanical*, as applied to Calvinists. What has gained them the honour of having the exclusive appropriation of these epithets? I believe no Calvinist has before thought of claiming them as tokens of the religious purity of his sect. Is it true, that they have ever been employed to denote the sincere religion of the heart? To call a man *austere* and *puritanical*, is at once to insinuate, that you have suspicions of his honest professions and latent piety. If I am not greatly mistaken, this is the universal sense of mankind; and if the inquiry were pursued, I have no doubt that the origin of these epithets would be found in the features of Calvinism just portrayed. I would only infer, that the use of these words adds no strength, but rather weakness, to your argument for the moral tendency of Calvinism.

I would make the same inference on another consideration. There has been no sect, probably, whom the world would more readily agree in calling *austere*, *puritanical*, and *of the stricter sort*, than the Pharisees of old, and yet our Saviour gives us no flattering picture of their morals or piety. Why may not the words have the same meaning, when applied to a modern sect, whether composed of Calvinists, or those of any other faith? Do you reply, that the Pharisees were hypocrites and pretenders, thinking more of outward appearances, than of inward purity? That is true, and it is the very reason why we call them austere and puritanical. No one would apply these epithets to the Apostles. But why not, except that their sincerity and piety were never doubted? If it had always been thus with all christians, if there had never been any one, *qui aliud est, et aliud simulat*, the use of these words, which you think an indication of the superior morals of Calvinists, would never have been known.

LETTER V.

Doctrines of Eternal Punishment, and Annihilation.

SIR,

BEFORE I enter on the immediate subject of this letter, allow me to offer a few remarks on one or two other particulars, embraced in your charges against the morality of Unitarians.

You say, they teach that *the various exercises of mind, supposed by some to be essential to piety, are mere dreams of enthusiasm.* This is so vague a charge, that it hardly admits of a formal reply. What you would have your readers understand by “the various exercises of mind,” which you mention, they are left to conjecture. To meet such a statement, it were irrelevant and useless to produce argument.

Unitarians believe piety to be a rational and operative principle, founded on a knowledge of God, of his will, and of his requirements. The piety, which they preach and strive to cultivate, is various in its character and objects. It is a devout and impressive sense of the majesty, goodness, mercy, and holiness of God. It fills the mind with serious meditations on the divine perfections, and the divine laws, and not only rules in the understanding, but penetrates the heart and kindles the affections. The pious mind will feel grateful for the blessings it receives, and find

its liveliest joy in pouring out thanksgivings and praises to the author of all good. Especially will it glorify his name for the way of salvation, which he has granted through his Son Jesus Christ. It will always have an impressive conviction of the unceasing presence of God, and be humbled with a sense of its own dependence and weakness. Unitarians think it also an essential part of piety, that they should strive to imitate the example of the Saviour in all things. While they love God, they desire to love his rational creatures, to treat them as brethren, respect their sincere professions, refrain from judging them harshly, or denying them the rights and hopes of christians.

They believe charity a very important branch of piety.

The man, who is ready to listen to the whispers of malevolence, raise the voice of detraction, or hurl the weapons of denunciation, gives no convincing testimony in their view, that the pride of his own heart is subdued, or that he has the temper of the Gospel. In few words, Unitarians preach a piety, which is intended to engage the heart, soul and strength in a sincere love and service of God, which shall restrain all the unhallowed desires and wayward inclinations, which shall make men acquainted with the deceitfulness and vanity of their own hearts, and clothe them with a deep humility, sorrow for their sins, and unfeigned repentance—which shall open the channels of benevolence and kind feelings towards their fellow men, direct their steps in the ways of Christ, raise

their minds and conversation to heaven, and prepare them for the future good pleasure and holy service of God.

It is an evil report to say, that Unitarians are averse to any “exercises of the mind,” which embrace these objects. Whatever ministers to true holiness in others, they joyfully commend, and would desire to imitate; and I deny that they are ever accustomed to attribute any thing to enthusiasm, which is obviously connected with a pure intention and a holy life. When we see persons fond of trumpeting to the world the extraordinary merits of their own piety, eager to scatter in the ears of the multitude the raptures of their indescribable exercises, loud in proclaiming themselves the peculiar favourites of heaven, clamorous in revealing the ecstacies with which their hearts are daily and hourly visited, and busy in drawing lines of distinction between themselves and others, whom, in the excess of their christian charity, they assign to lower ranks in religious faith, attainments, and purity, however sincere and ardent they may be in their endeavours,—whenever we see such persons, experience has taught us, that we ought to be prepared for more of spiritual pride and self complacency, than of unfeigned piety, true holiness, or the heavenly spirit of the meek and lowly Jesus. We are unwilling to allow, that we have been heedless observers, and we frankly confess, that we have seen no persons more barren in the genuine fruits of religion, than those who make the loudest professions, talk the most of secret and invisible com-

munications, and weary the world with endless details and incidents with which no one has any concern but their own souls and their God.

We have never discovered, that the dispositions of such persons have borne any uncommon marks of conformity to the will of God, that they were ready to make any extraordinary sacrifices in the divine service, or were more abstracted than others of humbler pretensions from the absorbing interests of the world. Show us the holy man of God, whose life is the transcript of his mind, and you will point to one, who communes with himself, who is an humble, silent worshipper, content to let the warmth of his zeal be felt through the medium of his good affections, and his religious impressions be seen in the tenour and unvarying rectitude of his life.

You next charge Unitarians with preaching, *that the strictness and seclusion from fashionable amusements, such as the theatre, the ballroom, and the card-table, which some inculcate, are uncommanded austeries, and being "righteous overmuch."* This charge, though more definite, is as groundless as the one just considered. I acknowledge that our preachers do not often so far forget themselves, or the sacred places in which they stand, as to preach about theatres, cardtables, and ballrooms. It is hoped and presumed, that few of them are so insensible of the solemnity of the occasion, and of the nature of their religion, as to profane the holy sabbath of God in his sanctuary by going into the haunts of dissipation, idleness, and vice, to find topics, and select images, for

the religious instruction and edification of a christian audience. These are not the things with which they wish to make their hearers familiar. No. They think it important to impress the words of Christ and his Apostles, the doctrines and rules of the Gospel, the duties and expectations of christians. They preach against vice, and the dominion of sin, and not against theatres, ballrooms, or cardtables. They proclaim the laws of God as they are revealed in his word, the necessity of obedience to these laws, and the judgments that await the impenitent.

Vice is a taint of the mind, from which it is not to be freed by referring to particular acts. Enlighten the conscience, make plain the duties and impress the obligations of religion, and you will gain a hold on the mind, which will serve as an anchor of safety in all times of doubt and peril. By this process you will make men see and confess their sins, and hasten to escape from their debasing thraldom. They will avoid wickedness, because they perceive its evil nature and tendency. There is no reason why we should attempt to particularize at the present day, more than our Saviour and his Apostles of old. I know not that our preachers can follow a better model; and the specimens, which you have selected and charged them with overlooking, are the last from which it could be hoped any aids would be gained to devotion, seriousness, or virtue.

Your charge goes farther, and accuses Unitarians not merely of neglecting to preach on these things, but of holding them up as "uncommanded austeri-

ties, and being righteous overmuch." Nothing can be more unfair, I will say, indeed, unfounded, than this insinuation. If it were an innocent mistake, it might be passed over, like many others, which I have not had time to notice. But it is hardly of this character, for it gives the impression, that Unitarians preach immorality ; that they not only avoid what is good, but inculcate what is bad. The wicked practices, from which other christians are warned by their leaders to abstain, are said to be represented by unitarian preachers as austerities to which their hearers need not submit, and as requiring an unnecessary degree of righteousness. Of this statement I can only say, it is one for which you cannot bring a shadow of proof, and is as opposite to the reality, as darkness to light. Unitarian preaching is distinguished for nothing more, than its rigid practical tendency. It requires men to be christians in the entire spirit of the Gospel, and to seek the favour of God by an unremitting obedience to his laws.

Your next charge is, that, according to this preaching, *all men, whatever may be their character, will finally be saved, or annihilated.* This is a subject of importance, and claims to be examined with attention. We have first to ascertain whether your position be correct in point of fact. It must be kept in mind, that you are professedly talking of doctrines "inculcated by unitarian preachers *all over the world.*" This you have repeated, seemingly to prevent any mistake in regard to the limits to which you would have your remarks applied.

It would be a laborious, and perhaps a fruitless task, to carry back our inquiries to the primitive Unitarians. We must be contented to commence with the churches in Transylvania and Poland, where Unitarianism was revived in modern times, and flourished under various fortunes for many years. The Racovian Catechism, although it was never adopted as a system of faith, is well known to express in very full terms the doctrines of those churches, and was drawn up by Socinus, aided by others among the most learned theologians of the fraternity. This Catechism teaches, by implication at least, the eternity of future punishment; and B. Wissowatius, in a note on the passage in which the sentiment is conveyed, asserts it "always to have been the opinion of the church, that the wicked will be doomed to punishment, and cast into the fire prepared for the devil and his angels." And again, after referring to the principal authors among the Fratres Poloni, and other eminent writers of the unitarian faith, he says, it is evident they "constantly maintained, that there will be a resurrection both of the just, and of the unjust, and that the latter shall be consigned to everlasting punishment, but the former admitted to everlasting life." Such was the opinion of the numerous Unitarians, who spread over Europe in the sixteenth century.*

* Wissowatius refers to Simplicius and Volkelius—to Crellius's Commentary on Matth. iii. 10; 2 Thess. i. 8, 9; Heb. x. 27—to Slichtingius on John v. 29—to Wolzogenius on Matth. iii. 12; x. 28; xxv. 41, 46; John v. 29—and to A. Wissowatius on Acts xxiv. 15. See Racovian Catechism, translated by Dr. T. Rees, p. 367. Note.

You will meet with the same sentiment in the Swiss and French churches, which have more recently come over to this faith. In the Catechism of these churches, which is called the Geneva Catechism, it is said of the wicked, that "they will be tormented with remorse and abandoned to despair, because they have *lost eternal happiness* by their own misconduct."* The belief of the unitarian churches in Holland on this subject, I have no means of ascertaining, but there is reason to suppose it is similar to that of the churches last mentioned.

In England opinions respecting this point are various among Unitarians, as they are with most other denominations. It is certain, however, that they universally believe in the future punishment of the wicked; but not many, probably, believe in the *eternity* of this punishment, at least in the sense of Calvinists. They do not pretend to define its precise duration, but hold that it will be in such degree and extent, as God in his justice and mercy shall see fit to inflict on the wicked.

The following extract is from the *Christian Disciple*, a work conducted by a number of clergymen in Boston and its vicinity, and may be supposed to convey the prevailing sentiment of the Unitarians in this country. "We cannot but wonder and lament, that any should so far pervert the oracles of God, as to persuade men to believe, that there is no punishment hereafter, an

* Geneva Catechism, p. 105. The texts quoted are Mark ix. 43; Matth. xxiii. 13.

error, we repeat, most dangerous to the interests of society ; it breaks down the barriers of conscience, and removes those salutary restraints, without which neither virtue, nor reputation, nor property, are secure.”*

The true state of the case is, then, that Unitarians *as a body universally* believe in the future punishment of the wicked. By a very large number this punishment has been considered *eternal*. By others it is supposed to be limited in duration, but to be severe and dreadful, according to the representations of the scriptures, and in proportion to the sins of each individual.

But even admitting it to be the faith of any number, or a majority, or the whole denomination of Unitarians, that all men will finally be restored to the favour of God, and saved, why should they be selected as singular in this belief, and exposed to censure, as if they maintained a novel doctrine, and one which has not been supported by many pious christians in all ages of the church ? It is no more essential to Unitarianism, than to Trinitarianism, and it is a fact which will not be contested, that by far the greater portion of those, who have embraced it, were Trinitarians. In its essential character it is just as closely allied to one of these general modes of faith as to the other.

Church history represents the doctrine of restora-

* Christian Disciple, No. 70, for March and April, 1819. See also Dr. Ware’s Letters, p. 130.

tion, or of the final salvation of all men, as prevailing from the first age of christianity. It was a favourite tenet with the great and learned Origen; and it is frequently mentioned in the writings both of the earlier and later Fathers. Some avow it to be their faith, and others introduce such allusions, as to show, that it was a tenet common to many christians at the time they wrote. Clemens Alexandrinus, who flourished in the latter part of the second century, and who was the preceptor of Origen, says, "The Lord is not a propitiation for our sins only, that is, of the faithful, but also for the whole world. Therefore he indeed saves all universally, some being converted by punishments, and others by their spontaneous inclination."* Gregory Nazianzen expresses his doubts of endless punishment, and intimates, while speaking of the supposed scripture sense of the doctrine, that we are to understand it in a milder form, and one more worthy of the Being that punishes.† Gregory Nyssen holds, "that it is absolutely necessary that evil should be removed out of the circle of being, and so entirely abolished, that nothing shall remain, which can be a receptacle of it."‡ Sulpitius Severus exhorts the Devil to cease from tempting and persecuting man, and tells him, that he could with perfect confidence in God pro-

* Non solum autem pro nostris peccatis Dominus propitiator est, hoc est fidelium, sed etiam pro toto mundo. Proinde universos quidem salvat; sed alios per supplicia convertens, alios autem spontanea consequentes voluntate. *Adumbrat. in Ep. 1 Joha. ver. 2.*

† See preface to White's Restoration of All Things, p. ix.

‡ Ibid. p. x.

mise even him the mercy of Christ if he would repent.*

Augustin speaks of persons engaged with him in controversy, who were patrons of this opinion, and who from him have been called merciful doctors. They did not believe in the eternity of punishment, but held, that “after certain periods of time, longer or shorter according to the sins of men, they would be liberated.”† Jerom was of opinion, that future punishments ought not to be measured by human wisdom, but left to God alone, “who knows whom, *how much*, and *how long*, he ought to judge.”‡ Fa-cundus professes himself a disciple of Origen.

Such were the opinions of some of the Fathers. In Germany this doctrine existed before the Reformation; and since that period it has been received by numerous persons in every sect of Christians. Many divines, and theological writers of note have been its defenders. It was countenanced by Tillot-son, of whom Whiston remarks, that “he chose rather to give up the divine veracity of God in these his

* Si tu ipse, O Miserabilis, ab hominum insectatione desisteres, et te factorum tuorum vel hoc tempore cum dies judicii in proximo est, poeniteret, ego tibi vere confisus in Domino Christi misericordiam pollicerer. *De Vita Mart.* p. 488. *Ed. Lug. Bat.* 1647.

† Nolunt credere poenam sempiternam futuram, sed post certi temporis metam pro eujusque peccati quantitate longioris sive brevioris eos inde existimant liberandos. *De Cir. Dei. lib. XXI. cap. 17.*

‡ Quod nos Dei solius debemus scientiae derelinquere eujus non solum misericordiae, sed et tormenta in pondere sunt; et novit quem, quomodo, et quamdiu, debet judicare. *Comment. in Esai. ad finem.*

See further quotations from the Fathers to the same purpose in the *Preface to White's Restoration*, and also in Burnet's *Tractatus De Statu Mortuorum et Resurgentium*, cap. X.

threatenings, than to defend the eternity of punishment." Tillotson believed eternal punishment to be threatened in the Scriptures, but held, that it might be only a threat, designed to keep men from sinning, but which God is by no means obliged to put in execution. Strange, and absurd, and derogatory as this notion may appear, it was seriously advanced by Tillotson. He insisted, however, that men ought to act on the supposition, that God is sincere, for although it is not necessary, that he should execute his threatenings, yet it is possible, and perhaps probable, and we ought to be prepared for the worst.*

Henry More is said to favour this doctrine in his *Divine Dialogues*. Dr. Bennett and Bishop Burnet in their respective treatises on the Articles of the Church of England, express a belief, that eternal death made no part of the sentence against Adam. Bishop Newton, Dr. Rust Bishop of Dromore, Dr. Thomas Burnet, Dr. Cheyne,† Jeremiah White, William Law, author of the *Serious Call*,‡ the pious

* Tillotson says, "He that threatens, keeps the right of punishing in his own hand, and is not obliged to execute what he hath threatened any farther than the reasons and ends of government do require; and he may, without injury to the party threatened, remit and abate as much as he pleaseth of the punishment that he hath threatened; and because in so doing he is not worse, but better than his word, nobody can find fault, or complain of any wrong or injustice therby done to him." *Sermons Vol. III.* p. 13.

Again, "The higher the threatening runs, so much the more mercy and goodness there is in it; because it is so much the more likely to binder men from incurring the penalty that is threatened." *Ibid. p. 17.*

† Cheyne held, that "some individuals may be delivered sooner, and some later, according as their expiation and purification is perfected." *Cheyne's Discourses*, p. 25.

‡ "As for the purification of all human nature," says Law, "either in this world, or some after ages, I fully believe it." *Letters*, p. 175.

and intellectual Hartley,* the equally pious Lavater, Chevalier Ramsay, Winchester, Coppin, Worthington, Stonehouse, and many others, believed in the restoration and final happiness of all men, and wrote with much learning and talent in explanation of their views.

All the persons mentioned above, it is believed, were Trinitarians, and accounted orthodox. And if you will examine the subject, you will unquestionably find the number of treatises written by Trinitarians in support of this doctrine, to be to those written by Unitarians, in a ratio of at least ten to one. Many Unitarians have touched the subject in connexion with other topics, but if we except Dr. Chauncy, hardly another will remain, who has written a formal work in defence of universal salvation. And what is still more remarkable, the sect itself, which has taken its distinctive name from this tenet of its faith, has, till very lately, been composed entirely of Trinitarians. Even now, the number of those of this sect, who have become Unitarians, is undoubtedly small.

Considering these things, it will not readily be seen on what principles of justice this doctrine is laid on the shoulders of Unitarians, and adduced as an evidence of the immoral tendency of their preaching. Let it be understood, that they believe, as the greater portion of them probably do, that God will restore his offending creatures to happiness, when he

* Observations on Man. Vol. II. p. 419—437.

has punished them according to the full measure of their sins; why should this faith be brought down upon them as a charge against their morality? The excellent men whose names have just been mentioned, were eminent examples of christian piety and character, as far as we know; nor have we ever heard that others among Trinitarians, holding the same faith, have on this account, been noted for defects of morals. Why then drag Unitarians forward, and exhibit them as worthy of reprobation for entertaining a sentiment in common with many other christians of various denominations, whose reputation for morals and piety has never been impeached on account of this tenet?

The doctrine of universal salvation is in very close accordance with high calvinistic principles. If you take away the notion of election and reprobation, it becomes a necessary part of the system which remains. If Christ has made an atonement for the sins of the whole world, or in other words, if his sufferings were taken as a substitute for the sins of men, his righteousness being imputed to them and their sins to him, it follows, that all men will attain salvation through him. The benefits of his substitution cannot be restricted, because, according to the calvinistic plan, he was an *Almighty Surety*. Calvinism, in the first place, makes all men so deplorably wicked, from the very constitution of their nature, as justly to consign them in a mass to everlasting perdition; and then, to rescue them from this state, it resorts to the sufferings and death of an Almighty Being, as

the only means of removing so great an evil. So far it is consistent enough; and one would suppose a balance is fairly made. However deep and radical the depravity, no particle of it could remain untouched by the efficacy of an *Almighty Surety*. But now comes the strange inconsistency of the scheme. Its framers were not prepared to think so favourably of the goodness and pardoning mercy of God, as the last part of the above plan would indicate. Hence they contrived, with perfect inconsistency, to incorporate the notion of election and reprobation. Had the surety been less than *Almighty*, this notion would not have involved so complete a contradiction. But to allow this would be to destroy the equality of the three persons in the trinity, as well as to provide an inefficient remedy for an infinite depravity. Amidst so many contending difficulties, it was perhaps wisely decided to choose the least.

Many Calvinists, seeing this absurdity, have employed themselves in improving their system by divesting it of this incoherent part, and have consequently discovered, that they were no longer Calvinists, but Universalists. This was the case with Relly, the friend and companion of Whitefield; and also with Dr. Huntingdon, who even gave the title of *Calvinism Improved* to his work, setting forth the doctrine of universal salvation. And if the growing propensity, which now shows itself among Calvinists, either to say as little as possible of their once favourite doctrine of election, or to deny it altogether, should continue, and, at the same time the other ri-

gid tenets of Calvinism should be retained, we may expect at no distant period to see the ranks of Universalism greatly strengthened from this quarter.

Mr. White, it is true, fancied himself a most zealous Calvinist, at the time he was writing a very ingenious argument against eternal punishment. He was so partial to election, the ruling dogma of his faith, that he could not give it up, but undertook the labour of reconciling it with the doctrine of universal restoration. He affirmed the election to be "not of qualities and principles, but of persons, not conditional but absolute," and after laying down this postulatum, he proceeds to show from the Scriptures how all men will be saved. It turns out in the end, of course, that his election falls to the ground, and he builds his theory on another foundation. This whim of clinging to the name of election was an embarrassment to his argument, but it is ingenious and strong even with this incumbrance.* Mr. Worthington argues for the restoration of all things, in consequence of the infinite efficacy of the atonement of Christ, and its power to remove every species of evil.†

So much for facts. It will be in unison with the general object of my remarks, to say a few words on the comparative moral tendency of the two doctrines just noticed. For argument's sake let it be

* Restoration of All things; or a Vindication of the Goodness and Grace of God to be manifested at last in the recovery of the whole Creation out of their Fall, 3d Ed. p. 87—109.

† Essay on Man's Redemption, p. 234—330

admitted, that they are both true. Although this would be an impossibility, yet the *influence* of a doctrine when thoroughly believed does not depend on its truth or falsehood; and we may reason on this influence without reference to either. I will confine my remarks to two particulars, as embracing most, if not all others, namely, the *love of God*, and the *sanc-tion of the divine laws*.*

What is the foundation of that love of God,

* With the truth or falsehood of either of the doctrines I have at present no concern. The controversy on this subject is well known to rest on the meaning of a single Greek word, *etew*, and its derivative *etewios*. The advocates for one doctrine affirm, that the word signifies an eternal duration when applied to the punishment of the wicked; while those on the other side maintain, that it should always be taken in a limited sense when thus applied. Hence the whole controversy becomes a matter of verbal criticism, and it is one presumption against the doctrine of eternal misery—a doctrine of so much moment if true—that it should be left to so slender a defence; and more especially, as the word is used in only five places in the New Testament in connexion with the punishment of sin, where it is *supposed* to mean eternal duration.

Innumerable examples might be cited, in which the word is used to denote a limited duration; and particularly, in the Septuagint Version of the Old Testament, other words are joined with it, which effectually restrict its meaning. Thus Exod. xv. 18. *The Lord shall reign, τον ειαντα, και ετ' ειαντα, και ετι,* *for ever and ever, and farther.* Dan. xii. 3. *They shall shine as the stars, εις τον ειαντα, και ετι, forever, and farther.* Mic. iv. 5. *We will walk in the name of the Lord our God, εις τον ειαντα, και επειαντα, for ever and beyond it.* See Chauncy's Salvation of all men, p. 263. These examples are enough to prove, that the word *may* be used in a limited sense. The only question to be settled is, whether it is thus used in reference to the punishment of the wicked. This, Dr. Chauncy and others have attempted to prove. It is argued on the contrary, that the same reasons why it should thus be limited when applied to the sufferings of the wicked, will give it a limited sense when it denotes the happiness of the righteous.

On this point Burnet says, “Nor is it of any weight, that the same word is applied to rewards and punishments; for the eternal happiness of the saints contradicts no attributes of God, and there we have no reason to recede from the literal sense; and words must yield to sense, otherwise, *This is my body,* is as explicit as to say, *Go into eternal fire.*” State of the Dead, chap. X.

which is the first and greatest duty of Christians? Does it not exist in those excellencies of his character, which shine forth in his benevolence, his mercy, his paternal kindness, and unbounded love for us? But how can you reconcile these attributes with the idea of his having doomed a certain number of his creatures to an endless misery, a state and degree of suffering, which bear no proportion to any amount of crimes, that a finite and frail being is capable of committing? Does not this doctrine, viewed thus abstractedly, take from the Deity every thing that is amiable, and lovely, and affectionate? Can you look up to such a being with that filial reverence, and holy gratitude, with that perfect trust, and hope, and confidence, which the Scriptures demand towards God, as the kind Father, protector, and righteous judge of men?

Admitting the doctrine to be true, which teaches, that all the wicked will be punished hereafter by an awful and indescribable visitation of God's displeasure, but at the same time in proportion to the deserts of every individual, till at length they shall all be purified and fitted for the employments and happiness of heaven, and be made to act an important part through all future ages in celebrating the praises and advancing the glory of God,—I say, admitting this doctrine to be true, does it not exhibit the Deity in a more exalted and engaging light, than the other doctrine, and under such a character, that the soul can with more freedom and fervour express towards him its emotions of piety and love, and as

will enable all men to discharge with greater security and confidence the duties springing out of the relation in which they stand to their Maker? This will hardly be denied; and if not, it follows most clearly, that the *moral influence* of this doctrine is more efficacious, than that of the other, in drawing us to a proper love and devout service of the Supreme Being.

In regard to a sanction of the divine laws securing a virtuous course, it must first be asked in what way the circumstance of future punishment has any influence on the mind? Evidently by its being believed and *fully realized*. Whether punishment be infinite or limited, will be of no consequence as a motive to action, any farther than it can be grasped and felt by the mind. When it is understood, that future suffering will be in exact proportion to the wicked deeds and intentions of this life, the idea is natural, easy, and rational. It accords with the inherent principles of justice. There are persons, whom no moral considerations will actuate, who refuse even the wise counsels and wholesome admonitions of reason, who listen with heedless indifference to the warning voice of conscience, and to the faithful but alarming testimony of their own hearts, and who, notwithstanding all the light, and aids, and encouragements they possess, may say, each one for himself, *video meliora proboque, deteriora sequor*. Such are not to be moved by any representation of futurity. There must be some degree of thoughtfulness before any distant prospects will be made to reflect back an influence that will be felt. If the sin-

ner will not be arrested in his career by a full conviction, that every sin will hereafter bring down upon him a punishment, whose intense ness and duration extend to the utmost reach of his understanding, it will be in vain, that you go beyond these bounds, and plunge into the unfathomable depths of eternity. If you intend to act upon the human mind, you must keep within its sphere. Hence it is, that the doctrine, which represents future punishment as in the highest degree severe, but limited, and proportionate to the wickedness of men, will produce all the effects, in regard to practical morals, that can be produced.

According to this scheme, every thing is credible, and analagous to what passes in this life. Every one will acknowledge, that the wicked should suffer in the world to come, for the same reasons, that they ought to suffer in the present. No doubts can be entertained, and no illusive hopes encouraged, where it is deeply felt, that every sin will inevitably be punished in proportion to its magnitude, and that the justice and mercy of God will be blended in all his dealings with his creatures.

I have no room to continue the parallel; but it seems to me from the above brief hints, that the interests of virtue gain nothing from the doctrine of eternal misery, which would not be gained in at least an equal degree from the other doctrine; and, therefore, admitting your charge to be just, which it certainly is not, the inference you would draw, in regard to the moral tendency of unitarian preaching, amounts to nothing.

As to the doctrine of *annihilation*, which you have charged on Unitarians, I shall say very little. The annihilation, or as others choose to call it, the *destruction*, of the wicked, after a certain period of suffering, has been believed by a few speculative individuals in all denominations of Christians. Burnet represents it to have been the faith of Tatian, Irenaeus, and Arnobius. "The souls that know not God," says Arnobius, "after long and tedious torments, are consumed by fire."* Dr. Watts held, that "the children of ungodly parents, who die in infancy, are annihilated."†

There is no justice in setting out this doctrine as a branch of Unitarianism, or as an evidence of the immorality of Unitarians, unless proof can be adduced, that it is a necessary part of their faith, or at least more common with them, than with Trinitarians. This cannot be done; nor has the doctrine any connexion with Unitarianism. Its alliance is just as close with the faith of Trinitarians as of Unitarians; and the writers against it have usually been of the latter class.

Dr. John Taylor, and Dr. Price, were no doubt destructionists; and Mr. Bourn has probably been its most zealous defender. Goadby has a note in which he seems inclined to this belief.‡ These were Unitarians, it is true, and some others might be added to the list; but several eminent persons of the same

* State of the Dead, chap. X.

† Adam's Religious World Displayed, Vol. III. p. 396.

‡ Goadby's Illustration of the Scriptures, Vol. iii. p. 1005.

denomination have argued with quite as much zeal on the other side. Dr. Chandler had a controversy with Mr. Bourn on the subject, in which he maintained eternal punishment. Dr. Cogan confutes the destruction scheme with his usual acuteness and force;* Dr. Estlin has written expressly against it;† and several articles have appeared in the Monthly Repository with the same bearing. The doctrine was not believed by Locke, Newton, Priestley, Jebb, Lindsey, nor any of the more celebrated early English Unitarians. It is an injurious insinuation, therefore, to impute this doctrine to Unitarianism, or to intimate that it is oftener attached to persons of this belief, than to those of the various shades of Trinitarianism.‡

But in any case it could hardly be supposed, that it would be held up as defective in moral influence, especially by a believer in eternal torments. It supposes a full measure of punishment to be inflicted on every soul, before it shall be put out of being, and that the term and degree of this punishment will be in proportion to the guilt of past sins. The only immoral influence, which it would seem to have, is, that it casts a shadow over the divine goodness, in representing God as destroying a portion of his spiritual

* Cogan's Theological Disquisitions, p. 361—439.

† Estlin's Discourses on Universal Restitution, p. 68.

‡ Miss Hannah Adams has failed in her usual accuracy in attributing this doctrine to the Polish Socinians, as is plain from the testimony of B. Wissowatius before quoted. *Hannah Adams's Dictionary of all Religions*, 4th ed p. 274.

creatures, towards whom he has declared his love to be unchangeable, and whom he has power to bless with everlasting happiness. This scheme is scarcely less opposed to reason, and the best feelings of man, than the doctrine of eternal misery, and its advocates profess to build it exclusively on the Scriptures.

So far as terror is a motive to good action, as Dr. Priestley has observed, this doctrine must certainly take precedence of all others. What idea can be more dismal, painful, and appalling, than that of ceasing to exist, after suffering the acutest misery for an indefinite length of time? Where is the man, however abandoned, in wickedness, however lost to a sense of virtue and duty, who, with all his crimes on his head, would not feel infinitely more comfort in the certainty of a future existence, although he must suffer the just punishment of his sins, than he would at the gloomy thought of falling into nothing, and of being forgotten even by his God? Do you believe a doctrine can be preached more terrible to the sinner, than that which puts him beyond the reach of infinite mercy, goodness, and love? If the conduct of men is to be regulated by terrific representations of the future, and if the doctrine of eternal punishment has any tendency to restrain them from vice, this must act with double force, as it is doubly awful in its nature and its prospects.

PART V.

SENTIMENTS AND MORALS OF CELEBRATED ENGLISH UNITARIANS.

LETTER I.

Theological Sentiments of Newton, Locke, and Watts.

SIR,

IN the closing remarks of your Letter, strong disapprobation is expressed, that Unitarians should presume to rank Newton, Locke and Watts, among their numbers. You intimate a belief, that in using this freedom with the two former, "those illustrious men are treated with great injustice;" and "against placing the pious, the heavenly-minded Watts in such company, you feel constrained to enter your solemn protest." As I had enumerated these men among others, who were not believers in the trinity, and as you have been so prompt to question the accuracy, and even the justice of this enumeration, I propose to devote a few words to a consideration of this topic.

It may be premised, that Unitarians do not recur to great names as affording any proof of the truth of their opinions. Error is not confined to the ignorant and unwise, nor is infallibility the prerogative of greatness. In religion we look for *proof* nowhere but in the Scriptures. The authority of great names ought, doubtless, to have its weight, not in convincing us in opposition to the word of God, but in confirming us in the conclusions to which we have come by a careful inquiry. Justice to ourselves, as well as to the cause we support, compels us to recur often to the names of distinguished Unitarians. It is among the delights of our adversaries to impress it on the public mind, that our insignificance must necessarily prove us heretics; that our opinions are too novel to be true; and that the voice of all the learned, and wise, and good, speaks loudly against us. This string is harped upon incessantly. No matter how false and discordant its notes, so long as their tone is sufficiently high, and they produce the desired effect on the multitude. Prejudices grow out of these errors. We desire to lessen the evil by removing the cause. We wish our brethren to be enlightened, to know the truth, and to have as few occasions as possible for uncharitableness and reproach. We are influenced by a double motive, therefore, in referring to distinguished names; first, the natural desire of showing that our faith has been embraced and supported by wise and excellent men; and secondly, the hope of softening the roughness, and tempering the violence of those, who indulge in

a license of obloquy and disparagement, which, we are willing to believe, is more the result of ignorance, than of a wicked disposition.

Let it be further observed, that in the cases of Newton and Locke, the labour of proof belongs to Trinitarians. These men have always been classed with Unitarians ; they have been perpetually quoted on that side of the question, nor have I ever heard of their authority being brought forward in favour of the trinity, or even of orthodoxy. Prove from their writings, or from the writings of their contemporaries, or from any well established facts, that they were Trinitarians, and the point will be settled. The persons, who manifest so lively a concern for what they profess to deem the injured reputation of these great men, have exhibited no proof to this effect. Until this be done, Newton and Locke must be considered Unitarians, as they always have been. I am not disposed, however, to decline an investigation of some of the positive evidences of the fact. The inquiry must necessarily be confined to a narrow space.

Sir Isaac Newton was one of the first, who formally engaged in proving the spuriousness of the famous text of the three heavenly witnesses, 1 John v. 7 ; and also in showing that the received reading of 1 Tim. iii. 16, is a corruption.* This subject was

* In regard to 1 Tim. iii. 16, Newton was of the same opinion as Dr. Samuel Clarke. Instead of *God manifest in the flesh*, he believed the true reading to be, *He who, or that which was manifest in the flesh*. "All the old versions," says Dr. Clarke, "have it *qui* or *quod*. And all the ancient Fa-

discussed in two letters said to have been written to Le Clerc. The language and arguments are precisely such as would be used by Unitarians, and such as Trinitarians of that day, before the controversy touching those passages had been much agitated, could not be supposed to have employed. In adverting to the testimony of Cyprian, Newton observes, that “he does not say, the Father, the *Word*, and the Holy Ghost, as in 1 John, v. 7, but the Father, the *Son*, and the Holy Ghost, as it is in Baptism, *the place from which they at first TRIED to derive the trinity*.”* Do you believe this language ever escaped from a Trinitarian? Instead of indicating any confidence in the doctrine of the trinity, does it not strongly imply that the advocates of this doctrine have TRIED in vain to find it in a text, to which they have universally resorted as a strong hold? The person, who can read these Letters with an unshaken conviction, that the author was not an antitrinita-

thers, though the copies of many of them have it now in the text itself, *θεός, Deus*, yet from the tenour of their comments upon it, and from their never citing it in the Arian controversy, it appears they always read it *qui or quod*. *Scripture Doctrine of the Trinity*, p. 88. Third Edit. Mill says, this text was never quoted as proof of Christ’s divinity, till the year 380, and then first by Gregory Nyssen.—*Gregorius Nyssenus primus omnium, &c.*

* See Newton’s works, Horseye’s Edition, vol. v. p. 498. In a note to this passage Bishop Horseye observes, “The insinuation contained in this expression, that the trinity is not to be derived from the words prescribed for the baptismal form, is very extraordinary to come from a writer who is no Socinian.” The extreme disingenuousness of this note is too obvious to require remark. By a Socinian, Bishop Horseye means a person, who denies the trinity; and Newton’s language would be “extraordinary” indeed, if he believed in a trinity. Horseye saw too clearly, that the only inference was, that he did not believe in it. Let charity assign as good a motive as it can for this insidious note.

rian, must have a rule of deciding the meaning of a writer from his language, which few will apprehend.

In referring again to the text in John, Newton says, "Let them make good sense of it who are able. For my part, I can make none. If it be said, that we are not to determine what is scripture, and what not, by our own private judgments, I confess it in places not controverted. *But in disputable points, I love to take up with what I can best understand. It is the temper of the hot and superstitious part of mankind, in matters of religion, ever to be fond of mysteries; and, for that reason, to like best what they understand least.* Such men use the Apostle John as they please; but I have that honour for him, as to believe, that he wrote good sense, and, therefore, take that sense to be his, which is the best, especially since I am defended in it by so great an authority."* It is readily admitted, that these words *might* be spoken by a Trinitarian. It must, nevertheless, be granted, that it is a kind of language, which no one of that faith has been known to use. The sentiments it inculcates are peculiar to Unitarians, and are continually attacked by their opponents with almost as much harshness, as their views of the trinity itself. The trinity is a mystery, and if that doctrine is to have the preference, which we "can best understand," who will ever be a Trinitarian?†

* Newton's Works, Vol. v. p. 529.

† In Newton's remarks on the Book of Revelations, he speaks as follows; "As the few and obscure prophecies concerning Christ's first coming were for the setting up of the christian religion, which ALL NATIONS have since corrupt-

It is known, that Erasmus received the text of the three witnesses into his Testament on the authority of a single manuscript in England. He doubted the value of this manuscript, and wrote much against it. Newton says, that his adversaries in England never answered his accusations, “but, on the contrary, *when they had got the Trinity into his edition*, they threw by their manuscript, if they had one, as an almanac out of date.”* It may be doubted whether a Trinitarian would have thus spoken.

When Sir Isaac Newton was Master of the Mint, the office of Assay Master was filled by Mr. Hopton Haynes. This gentleman was a Unitarian, and wrote with much ability and learning a treatise on the subject, which has recently been several times republished.† Mr. Haynes, who was long and intimately acquainted with Newton, declared to a friend,‡ that “he did not believe our Lord’s pre-existence, being a Socinian, as we call it, in that article; and that Sir Isaac much lamented Dr. Clarke’s embracing Arianism, which opinion he feared had been, and still would be, if

ed; so the many and clear prophecies concerning the things to be done at Christ’s second coming, are not only for predicting, but also for *effecting a recovery of the long-lost truth.*” Ibid. 449. What is the corruption here spoken of, and what is the long-lost truth? Read Priestley’s History of Early Opinions, and of the Corruptions of Christianity, and you will discover the sentiments of Unitarians on the subject, which I have no doubt were the sentiments of Newton.

* Ibid. p. 530.

† This work is called a *Scripture Account of the Attributes and Worship of God, and of the Character and Offices of Jesus Christ.*

‡ The Rev. Richard Baron, “a person of great probity and public spirit, and known by many valuable publications.”

maintained by learned men, a great obstruction to the progress of christianity.”* This declaration is alone amply sufficient. It was made by a man who would not be likely to mistake. I am aware of Magee’s insinuations, that Haynes and Baron were *Unitarians*, and therefore not to be trusted; but I am also aware of many other insinuations of his not less gross or illiberal. When Unitarianism is concerned, no man is more fruitful in sneers and low ridicule, none more barren in argument and fact. In the present instance, as in many others, his poisoned arrows rebound upon himself. As he has substituted sneers for reasons, it is plain enough that no reasons were at hand. An impartial and unbiassed writer has said of Haynes, in speaking of his general character, without allusion to his theological opinions, “that he always behaved himself highly worthy of the great trust reposed in him, being indefatigable and most faithful in the execution of his offices;” and adds, “We may conclude, from his being in the Mint, at the time Sir Isaac Newton presided there, and from his known piety and love of learned conversation, that he had frequent intercourse and enjoyed the good opinion of that excellent man.”† The probability, that an intimacy and a similarity of opinion existed between them, is also strengthened by the fact mentioned in

* See the Preface to the 2d edition of Haynes’s *Scripture Account*, p. vii.

† Nichols’ *Literary Anecdotes*, vol. ii. p. 140, 141, as cited by Dr. Carpenter, and in Mr. Aspland’s *Preface* to the 4th edition of the *Scripture Account*.

Wetstein's Prolegomena, that Haynes translated the Two Letters above mentioned into Latin.*

There is yet another argument directly in point, and in my mind an unanswerable one. It is well known, that Newton left several papers on theological subjects, which have never been permitted to come before the world. They were cautiously excluded from Horsley's large edition of his works. These papers have been said to contain more at large the author's views of the Unitarian system; nor has this report been contradicted by the persons who hold the papers in their possession. It was

* Whiston says, that Sir Isaac Newton was a Eusebian, or Arian, but he does not seem to have been intimately acquainted with his particular views. Whiston was many years on friendly terms with Newton, and his testimony is abundant, that he did not consider him a Trinitarian. *Whiston's Memoirs of Himself*, Vol. I. p. 206.

Whiston drew up an abstract of his reply to Newton's Chronology, which was published in a periodical work of that day, entitled *The Present State of the Republic of Letters*. This abstract is contained in the number for April, 1729, about two years after Sir Isaac Newton's death. Among other things Whiston has a good deal to say respecting Newton's opinions concerning the trinity, and states expressly, that he had early discovered that doctrine to be a corruption, which crept into the christian church in the primitive ages. He intimates, also, that Newton had left several papers on this subject.

Near the close of the article he observes; "I now beg leave before I conclude, to address myself to the remainder of those heads of colleges, and of those members both of Convocation, and of the late Court of Delegates, who banished and persecuted me for pretended heresy, the pretended Arian heresy; and to put them in mind, that they banished, they persecuted me for the very same christian doctrines, that *the great Sir Isaac Newton had discovered and embraced many years before me*;—and for which christian doctrines, had he ventured as plainly and openly to publish them to the world as I thought myself obliged to do my own discoveries, they must, thirty or forty years ago, have expelled and persecuted the great Sir Isaac Newton also." *Republic of Letters*, Vol. III. p. 277—286. Let it be remembered, that Whiston was intimately acquainted with Newton for more than thirty years.

not contradicted by Horsley, who examined the papers, and declared them unsuitable for publication. What could Horsley find in any theological writings of Sir Isaac Newton, which he deemed proper to keep in the dark ? This question has been answered in conformity with the common sense of mankind, by a writer, who cannot be supposed to have spoken from interested motives. "Newton's religious opinions were not orthodox. For example, he did not believe in the trinity. This gives us the reason why Horsley, the champion of the trinity, found Newton's papers unfit for publication. But it is much to be regretted, that they have never seen the light."* A very large portion of these papers, as stated by the executors, were on religious subjects. Among others never published was an account of corruptions of scripture, and more than seventy folio sheets containing paradoxical questions concerning Athanasius.†

* Thompson's *History of the Royal Society*, p. 283.—*Annals of Philosophy*, vol. ii. p. 322; as quoted by Mardon.

† An imperfect copy of Newton's *History of Two Notable Corruptions of Scripture* first appeared in London, 1754, under the title of *Two Letters to Le Clerc*. In the author's manuscript, Bishop Horsley says they are not addressed to any particular person, although conceived in the epistolary form. The following paragraph, translated from Wetstein, contains some curious facts, by which it appears, that Le Clerc received them from Locke without knowing who was their real author.

"The illustrious Sir Isaac Newton," says Wetstein, "wrote two letters in English concerning the true reading of the texts 1 John, v. 7, 8; and 1 Tim. iii. 16, in which by his critical sagacity, his diligence, and the abundance of his materials collected from every quarter, from manuscripts, versions, the Latin and Greek Fathers, and indeed from the whole compass of ecclesiastical history, he has so completely established his point, as to reduce it almost to a mathematical certainty. He has accomplished what would seem next to impossible for a man, whose former studies had been so remote from this kind of learning."

I will only add, that Dr. Chalmers has confessed his belief in the unitarian sentiments of Newton—awkwardly enough, to be sure, but still it is a confession—and this, after making him not only the greatest and wisest philosopher, but the acutest and profoundest theologian, whom the world has seen.*

"These letters were copied out by Locke, with his own hand, and sent to Le Clerc, who mentioned them in the year 1703, in a preface to Mill's New Testament edited by Kuster. These are the words of Le Clerc. 'I have in my possession an elegant dissertation in English, which defends the Vulgate reading of 1 Tim. iii. 16. [that is, *quod* instead of *Deus.*] I know not by whom this treatise was written, but it was transmitted to me sometime ago by the celebrated Mr. Locke. It is worthy to see the light, and perhaps would already have been published, if it had been rendered into Latin.' After the death of Le Clerc, these two epistles, with a parcel of other letters written to him, were committed to my custody, that they might be deposited in the library of the Remonstrants. As they were mutilated at the beginning and end, I made several attempts to obtain from the heirs of Newton the deficient parts, that our copy might be perfect. But I did not succeed, although I understood they had complete copies, both in English, and the Latin translation of Hop-ton Haynes. These two epistles are mentioned by Whiston and Berriman." *Wetst. Prolegom.* p. 185.

From the above account we learn, that this elegant tract, one of the most laboured and learned of all Newton's productions, would never have been made public, if the mutilated copy from Holland had not first appeared in London, more than fifty years after it was written, and induced the heirs of Newton to give a corrected copy from the author's manuscript. The persons appointed by Newton's executors to examine his papers tell us of "fifty one half sheets in folio, being an *Historical Account of Two Notable Corruptions of Scripture,*" which in the mass of many others they "judged not fit to be printed," as testified by their minutes of this examination. The truth is, the time in which they were employed in looking over Newton's unpublished papers was not more than sufficient to ascertain their subjects, and the number of sheets. In three days they examined, judged, and condemned an immense body of papers, which had employed the deepest thoughts of Newton for half a century. See an account of the *Works and Papers of Newton* in the *Edinburgh Encyclopedia, Amer. Edit. Vol. XIV,* p. 486.

* Compare the *Preface to Dr. Chalmers' Astronomical Discourses* with the second sermon in the course. See likewise *Unitarian Miscellany*, vol. i. p. 167.

For further information respecting the sentiments of Newton, consult May-

Concerning the opinions of Locke I have but little to say. The main point in question is sufficiently settled by a single fact, which is, that public sentiment has invariably ranked him among Unitarians, and no one has succeeded in proving this sentiment erroneous. I know what Magee and Bishop Burgess have attempted to do, and I also know what they have totally failed to accomplish. They were willing to believe, like yourself, that Locke was "treated with great injustice," by having Unitarianism imputed to him, and they generously undertook the labour of freeing him from this imputation. They read his works, and no doubt with all the fidelity and zeal, which their concern for his reputation demanded. They made quotations, but to what did they amount? To nothing, indeed, which advances their purpose. They have not been able to discover a fact, hint, or allusion, which warrants the inference, that Locke believed in a trinity. In relation to this doctrine, they have not quoted a syllable to which Unitarians generally will not assent. Is not the conclusion from these particulars directly the contrary of that, which Magee and Burgess would establish. And if they have failed, who will undertake the task?*

don's *Letter to the Rev. Dr. Chalmers*; and Carpenter's examination of Magee's Charges against Unitarians and Unitarianism, p. 102.

* Prebendary Dennis gravely cited a work called, *Locke's Common Place Book to the Bible*, as a proof that he was a Trinitarian. Others, perhaps, may have been influenced by the same authority. This book was first published in 1763. It was afterwards enlarged, and by a species of pious impo-

Locke has written largely upon the christian religion. The primary object of his *Reasonableness of Christianity* was to ascertain the kind of faith necessary to make a man a christian. But in the course of this investigation he exhibits, with some degree of minuteness, his views of the christian dispensation. In his two *Vindications* he expresses his thoughts more at length, and dwells particularly on what his opponents called fundamentals, and charged him with omitting. This list of fundamentals is in close resemblance to the one you have drawn up, as containing articles essential to the faith of any person, who would be entitled to the name of christian. Locke denied, that any such articles were necessary, and maintained what he had asserted and proved in his *Reasonableness of Christianity*, that one essential article of faith only was preached by the Saviour and his apostles, namely, *that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of God*. Whoever professed this faith was considered a member of Christ's church. Locke has also left an elaborate paraphrase and commentary on four of St. Paul's Epistles. In all these writings nothing appears, which shows the author to have had any leaning towards the doctrine of a trinity, or any other of the doctrines of high orthodoxy. Does not this amount to a demonstration, that he believed in none of these things? Was it ever

sition was sent out under the name of Mr. Locke. Notwithstanding it has always been known to be spurious, it is still published as Locke's, with a preface ascribed to him, which, as Bishop Law has said, "is neither sense nor English."

known, that a Trinitarian has written expressly on the fundamental articles, without in any shape embracing the distinguishing doctrine of his faith? It is presumed not. Consult Locke's interpretation of those texts in the Epistles usually quoted in support of the trinity. In no case will you discover any tendency to this doctrine.*

The facts here stated are conclusive. They constitute an argument, which can be overthrown only by positive evidence, that Locke was a Trinitarian. Let this be produced, and the controversy will be at an end.

I have room for no more than two or three quotations from Locke's works. It will appear from these, however, that the *principles*, by which he was guided in explaining the religion of the Saviour, and interpreting the word of God, are in all respects the same as those of Unitarians.

In the first place, he believed the truths revealed by Jesus to be adapted to the understanding; that all men, the simple as well as the wise, "are concerned in this religion, and ought to *understand it*, in order to their salvation." For thus declaring religion to be an intelligible thing, he drew upon him the censure and sneers of his adversary. In reply,

* Examine particularly the famous text of Rom. ix. 5, which Trinitarians consider so strong in their favour. Locke's paraphrase gives it a meaning wholly irrelevant to their purpose. Instead of the rendering of the common version, which reads as follows, "Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever," Locke renders it, "Christ is come, he who is over all, God be blessed for ever."

he said, “I hope it is no derogation to the christian religion to say, that the fundamentals of it, that is, all that is necessary to be believed in it, by all men, is easy to be understood by all men. This I thought myself authorized to say, by the very easy and very intelligible articles insisted on by our Saviour and his Apostles ; which contain nothing but what could be understood by the bulk of mankind.”* Now I would ask, whether the trinity be a “very easy and a very intelligible article,” and whether it “contains nothing which may not be understood by the bulk of mankind ?” I would also ask, whether the principles here assumed by Locke be not at variance with those universally received and acted upon by Trinitarians ?†

Furthermore, do not all believers in the trinity consider this doctrine of the highest importance, and a necessary article of faith ? Do they not all contend, that it was preached by the Saviour and his Apostles ? But Locke virtually denied both of these propositions. He asserted, that Jesus and the Apostles preached only one article as essential, which was the

* *Vindication of the Reasonableness of Christianity*; Locke’s Works, eleventh edition, Vol. vii. p. 176. See also Locke’s views of this subject in the Chapter on *Faith and Reason*, in his *Essay on the Human Understanding*, Book iv. c. 18.

† In the year 1781, a book was published in England by a Mr. Milner, deplored the calamities, which were about to come upon the world, by introducing human reason into religion. Mr. Locke is made the great offender, and in alluding to him, the writer utters the following lamentations. “Reason has impertinently meddled with the Gospel, and that with such overbearing credulity, as to darken it more and more ; and rivers of tears would not suffice to bewail the increase of moral misery, which, since Mr. Locke’s time, has pervaded these kingdoms.” And again ; “it was Mr. Locke, who first, unhappily, gave reason leave to intrude herself into the secrets of christianity.”

Messiahship of Jesus. Hear what he says in reply to his opponents, who charged him with being a Socinian, because he omitted the trinity and its collateral doctrines. "Did he amiss," he asks, alluding to himself, "that he offered to the belief of those, who stood off, that and only that, which our Saviour and his Apostles preached, for the reducing the unconverted world; and would any one think he in earnest went about to persuade men to be christians, who should use that as an argument to recommend the Gospel, which he has observed men to lay hold on, as an objection against it? To urge such points of controversy, as necessary articles of faith, when we see *our Saviour and the Apostles, in their preaching, urged them not as necessary to be believed to make men christians*, is, by our own authority, to add prejudices to prejudices, and to block our own way to those men, whom we would have access to, and prevail upon."* Can any thing be plainer than this passage? He tells you, that he had not enforced the doctrines, for the omission of which he was charged with the heresy of Socinianism, because, "our Saviour and the Apostles urged them not as necessary to be believed, to make men christians." The trinity was one of these doctrines. What is the inference, if it be not, that Locke did not believe the trinity to have been preached by the Saviour and his Apostles?†

* *Vindication, &c.* Works, vol. vii. p. 164.

† I cannot forbear quoting in this place, a passage from Locke's *Reasonableness of Christianity*, which presents in clear terms the substance of his views respecting essential articles of faith. He states, "that above threescore years

Some persons seem to have deceived themselves in regard to Locke's opinions, by not giving a proper attention to the object of his reasonings, especially in his two *Vindications*. When the *Reasonableness of Christianity* appeared, it was furiously attacked by Edwards, in a treatise called *Socinianism Unmasked*, and charged not only with inculcating Socinianism, but even the desolating tenets of deism and atheism. The *Vindications* were written in reply to Edwards,

after our Saviour's passion, St. John knew nothing else required to be believed for the attaining of life, but that ' Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God,' " and then goes on to add the following words;

" To this it is likely it will be objected by some, that to believe only that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah, is but an historical, and not a justifying, or saving faith.

" To which I answer, that I allow to the makers of systems and their followers, to invent and use what distinctions they please, and to call things by what names they think fit. But I cannot allow to them, or to any man, an authority to make a religion for me, or to alter that which God hath revealed. And if they please to call the believing that, which our Saviour and his Apostles preached, and proposed alone to be believed, an historical faith, they have their liberty; but they must have a care, how they deny it to be a justifying or saving faith, when our Saviour and his Apostles have declared it so to be, and taught no other, which men should receive, and whereby they should be made believers unto eternal life; unless they can so far make bold with our Saviour, for the sake of their beloved systems, as to say, that he forgot what he came into the world for, and that he and his Apostles did not instruct people right in the way and mysteries of salvation.

" For that this is the *sole doctrine* pressed and required to be believed in the whole tenour of our Saviour's and his Apostles' preaching, we have showed through the whole history of the Evangelists and the Acts. And I challenge them to show, that there was any other doctrine, upon their assent to which, men were pronounced believers or unbelievers, and accordingly received into the church of Christ, as members of his body, as far as mere believing could make them so; or else kept out of it. This was the only gospel article of faith, which was preached to them. And if nothing else was preached every where, the Apostle's argument will hold against any other articles of faith to be believed under the Gospel. ' How shall they believe that whereof they have not heard?' Rom. x. 14. For to preach any other doctrines necessary

and conducted in a masterly train of logical reasonings, aiming at one point only, which was to disprove the charge of a tendency to the peculiar tenets of Socinianism, and to irreligion in the *Reasonableness of Christianity*. In doing this, Locke had no occasion to bring forward and explain his own opinions on all the topics embraced in the controversy. It was his sole object to show the disingenuousness of his adversary in making charges, and drawing inferences, totally unwarranted by any thing in the work, which he was pretending to examine. It was no part of his purpose to make known the tenets of his faith, but to show that the objections made against his book, on account of its supposed irreligious tendency, were ill natured and unfounded.

Bishop Stillingfleet had the acuteness to discover, as he imagined, a secret attack on the trinity, even in the *Essay on the Human Understanding*. Locke, in his reply, does not say that he believes in the trinity, and that therefore the bishop's insinuations are false, but goes on to repel the charges, by showing that the book has nothing to do with the trinity, and is gratuitously dragged into the controversy. These facts explain the reason why Locke was less explicit on many topics, than would be expected, if he were explaining and defending his own tenets.*

to be believed, we do not find that any body was sent." *Reasonableness of Christianity*; Works, vol. vii. p. 102.

It is not necessary to ask whether this is the language of Trinitarians. See more in Locke's letter to Limborth on the unity of God. *Works*, vol x. p. 71.

* The following extract from Locke's *Second Reply to the Bishop of Worcester*, will give us no very indistinct notion of his views of the trinity.

"I presume your lordship, in your discourse in vindication of the doctrine

According to bishop Law, there is much reason for supposing Locke to have been a contributor to the *Unitarian Tracts*, published in England, near the close of the seventeenth century.* It is not easy, perhaps, to ascertain his precise opinions respecting the nature of Christ. Like the old Socinians, and the generality of Unitarians of the present day, he believed in the miraculous conception ; but it will be a difficult thing to prove, that he believed in the simple humanity, or the worship of Christ, which were also two of the leading tenets of Socinianism. Lardner considered him an Arian, and ranked him with Dr. John Taylor, as may be seen in his Letter on the Logos.† And, indeed, many of Locke's interpretations, contained in the *Paraphrase and Notes on the*

of the trinity, intends to give it to us as it has been received in the christian church. And I think your words, viz ; 'it is the sense of the christian church, which you are bound to defend, and not the particular opinions of your own,' authorise one to think so. But if I am to own it, as your lordship has there delivered it, I must own that I do not understand ; for I confess your exposition of the sense of the church wholly transcends my capacity.

"If you require me to own it with an implicit faith, I shall pay that deference as soon to your lordship's exposition of the doctrine of the church, as any one's. But if I must understand and know what I own, it is my misfortune, and I cannot deny, that I am far from owning what you in that discourse deliver, as I can be far from expressing the most unintelligible thing that ever I read, to be the doctrine I own. Whether I make more use of my poor understanding in the case, than you are willing to allow every one of your readers, I cannot tell ; but such an understanding as God has given me, is the best I have, and that which I must use in the apprehending what others say, before I can own the truth of it ; and for this there is no help that I know." *Works*, vol. iv. p. 198.

* Preface to Locke's Works, p. vii.

† Lardner's Works, vol. xi. p. 116.

Epistles, seem to be founded on the Arian hypothesis. This is particularly true of the passage referred to by Lardner, where Locke speaks of the spiritual part of Christ being derived from God “by a divine extraction,” which plainly shows, that in his highest nature, he considered him a derived being, and consequently subordinate to the Deity.* But this discussion is of little importance in the present connexion. It is enough, that Locke has always been accounted a Unitarian, that his writings confirm this sentiment, and that no adequate evidence has been offered to the contrary.

We come next to the opinions of Watts, whom you seem peculiarly solicitous to rescue from the hands of Unitarians. As the reasons you present for believing him to have “lived and died a Trinitarian,” are for the most part irrelevant to the purpose, it will be needless to examine them in detail. They may all be summed up in this one position; that, as he was once a Trinitarian, he must always have been such. You have proved, beyond contradiction, what no one has ever denied, or doubted; namely, that Watts at one period of his life was zealous in the trinitarian faith, and wrote much in its favour. On this point there is no disagreement. But here you stop short. The only important thing in the argu-

* See Locke’s paraphrase and note on Romans i. 4. The note is as follows.
“‘According to the spirit of holiness,’ is here manifestly opposed to, ‘according to the flesh,’ in the foregoing verse, and so must mean that more pure and spiritual part in him, which, *by divine extraction*, he had immediately from God.”

ment is left untouched. It is believed, that Watts changed his opinions during his lifetime, and at length went over to the unitarian faith. The reasons for this belief you have not disproved, nor even approached. All you have said, therefore, may be taken for granted, except your inferences ; and with this concession, I will proceed, in few words, to state some of the facts, which confirm the Unitarianism of Dr. Watts.*

* It was not contrary to the christianity of Watts, to search for the truth, and change his opinions when he found them erroneous. He did not entangle himself with creeds of men's invention, nor promise to *conform* to a system of faith, as the only true explication of scripture. This, he knew, would be stopping at once the channel of inquiry, and giving perpetual currency to all the errors, which the folly, ignorance, and selfishness of men, have entailed upon the world.

"I thank God," said he, "that I have learned to retract my former sentiments, and change them, when upon stricter search and review they appear less agreeable to the divine standard of faith.

"It doth not belong to such poor, imperfect beings, as we are, to remain for ever immovable in all the same opinions, that we have once indulged, nor to stamp every sentiment with immortality. For a man to be obstinately tenacious of an old mistake, and incorrigibly fond of an obscure phrase or conception, because he has once admitted it, is the shame, and not the glory, of human nature."—*Preface to Dissertations relating to the Christian Doctrine of the Trinity.* Part II. *Works, Vol. VI.* p. 420.

"How vain a presumption it is, with a pretence of divine authority, to impose mere human explications upon the consciences of men, and to forbid them all the sacred blessings of especial communion in the Gospel, unless they testify their assent to such a particular hypothesis, or scheme of explication, which the imposers confess to be human, and yet impose it in their own prescribed form of words.

"The persons, who are guilty of this uncharitable practice, may consecrate their impositions, and their excommunications, with holy names, and call them pure zeal for the divinity of Christ ; but I suspect it will be found in the great day, to deserve no better a character than a mistaken zeal for the honour of Christ, mingled, perhaps, with zeal for the divinity of their own notions."—*Essay on the true Importance of any human Schemes to explain the sacred Doctrine of the Trinity.* Sec. III. *Works, Vol. VI.* p. 594.

A letter is extant, which was written by the Rev. Samuel Merivale to Dr. Priestley, in which the sentiments of Dr. Lardner on the subject of Watts's opinions are expressed in the most unequivocal terms. In conversation with Mr. Merivale, as stated in the letter, this great man observed ; "I think Dr. Watts never was an Arian, to his honour be it spoken. When he first wrote of the trinity, I reckon he believed three equal divine persons. But in the latter part of his life, for several years before his death, and before he was seized with an imbecility of his faculties, he was a *Unitarian*. How he came to be so, I cannot certainly say ; but I think it was the result of his own meditations on the Scriptures. He was very desirous to promote that opinion, and wrote a great deal upon the subject."

After this conversation, Mr. Merivale, wishing to obtain further information respecting Watts's unpublished papers, wrote a letter of inquiry to Dr. Lardner, from whom he received the following reply ;

"I question whether you have anywhere in print Dr. Watts's last thoughts upon the trinity. They were known to very few. My nephew, Neal, an understanding gentleman, was intimate with Dr. Watts, and often with the family where he lived. Sometimes in an evening, when they were alone, he would talk to his friends in the family, of his new thoughts concerning the person of Christ, and their great importance ; and that, if he should be able to recommend them to the world, it would be the most considerable thing that ever he performed. My nephew,

therefore, came to me, and told me of it, and that the family was greatly concerned to hear him talk so much of the importance of these sentiments. I told my nephew, that Dr. Watts was right in saying they were important, but I was of opinion that he was unable to recommend them to the public, because he had never been used to a proper way of reasoning on such a subject. So it proved. My nephew being executor, had the papers, and showed me some of them. Dr. Watts had written a good deal, but they were not fit to be published. *Dr. Watts's Last Thoughts were COMPLETELY UNITARIAN.*"*

These facts are too plain and conclusive to need comment. They rest on the authority of Lardner, and they could not rest on a higher. He barely stated what he saw and knew. Prove Lardner to have been guilty of a deliberate falsehood, or mistaken in a case where he had every possible opportunity of knowing the truth, and you will invalidate his testimony. Till this be done, no one can righfully refuse his assent to the position it establishes; which is, that the unpublished papers of Watts clearly showed him to have been a Unitarian.

But we need not recur to unpublished writings. Enough may be found in print to convince us, that he was not a Trinitarian, whatever else he may have been. In his *Solemn Address to the Deity* he speaks as follows;

“ Dear and blessed God, hadst thou been pleased,

* See the whole of Mr. Merivale's Letter, in Belsham's Memoirs of Lindsey, p. 216.

in any one plain scripture, to have informed me which of the different opinions about the holy trinity, among the contending parties of christians, had been true, thou knowest with how much zeal, satisfaction and joy, my unbiassed heart would have opened itself to receive and embrace the divine discovery. Hadst thou told me plainly, *in any single text*, that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, are three real distinct persons in the divine nature, I had never suffered myself to be bewildered in so many doubts, nor embarrassed with so many *strong fears of assenting to the mere inventions of men*, instead of divine doctrine ; but I should have humbly and immediately accepted thy words, so far as it was possible for me to understand them, as the only rule of my faith. Or hadst thou been pleased to express and include this proposition in the several scattered parts of thy book, from whence my reason and conscience might with ease find out, and with certainty infer this doctrine, I should have joyfully employed all my reasoning powers, with their utmost skill and activity, to have found out this inference, and engrafted it into my soul.

“ But how can such weak creatures ever take in so strange, so difficult, and so abstruse a doctrine as this, in the explication and defence whereof, multitudes of men, even men of learning and piety, have lost themselves in infinite subtleties of disputes, and endless mazes of darkness. And can this *strange and perplexing notion of three real persons going to make up one true God*, be so necessary and so important a part of

that christian doctrine, which, in the Old Testament and the New, is represented as so plain and so easy, even to the meanest understandings?"

Three things are obvious from these extracts. *First*, that Watts did not believe the trinity, as usually understood, to be "plainly taught in any single text;" *secondly*, that in his mind it was not so expressed in the Scriptures at large, as to be intelligible to "reason and conscience;" and *thirdly*, that the "strange and perplexing notion of three real persons going to make up one true God," is not a "necessary and important part of the christian doctrine," whatever may be thought of its reality. Is there a Trinitarian of the present day, who will assent to either of these propositions? It was a favourite opinion at the council of Nice, and for many ages after, that the trinity was not contained in the Scriptures, but taught by tradition. It has never been known, however, that Dr. Watts had a partiality for traditions, or that it was common with him to believe in doctrines, which his "reason and conscience" could not find in the Scriptures.*

Hear what he says in his *Faithful Inquiry*, respect-

* In his treatise on *The Importance of any Human Scheme to explain the Trinity*, Watts says, "It must be confessed with sorrow and shame, that some writers have invented, or enlarged special explications of the sacred doctrine with too great a neglect of scripture in their studies. They have affected to be wise in words without ideas. They have set forth their own learned explications of the doctrine of the trinity, in sounding scholastic phrases, and hard words, with great assurance, and have helped men to talk roundly on this sublime subject, with a great exuberance and fluency of such language, as has been established into orthodoxy." *Works*, Vol. VI. p. 592.

ing the word *person*, as applied to the three parts of the trinity.

“Those writers, who call the sacred three by the name of three *persons*, do not assert or maintain, that this very word or expression of three persons, is found in Scripture, nor is the word *person* *expressly applied to them all three*.

“A distinct person, in the full and proper sense of the word among men, must be a distinct spirit; for a distinct person requires at least another distinct consciousness with another distinct will, which seems to infer another different spirit. *And surely the Deity is not made up of three such distinct and different spirits.*

“Besides, it is sufficiently evident, that in the language of Scripture, and in the writings of the Jewish nation, those things, which are not strictly and properly *persons*, are often represented in a personal manner, as Wisdom, Law, Righteousness, Charity. And, therefore, the Sacred Three may be called three persons, or at least, *Three Scriptural Persons*, I hope, without offence, and without entering into the tedious, learned, and philosophical difficulties about the word person.”*

What is the import of these passages? Certainly not, that the Sacred Three are distinct, personal agents. They are not three beings, who have each a “distinct consciousness and will.” That is, they are not distinct beings in any sense. They are “scriptural persons?” But what is a scriptural per-

* Faithful Inquiry after the ancient and original Doctrine of the Trinity, taught by Christ and his Apostles, p. 19, 20.

son? The writer has told us, that he understands by this term, the same as *Wisdom*, *Law*, *Righteousness*, when personified in the Scriptures. According to this sense, the three persons of the Deity are personifications of his modes of action. There is no spirit, or agent, distinct from the one true God. His unity is left untouched, and no Unitarian would dissent from the substance of the views here taken.

In speaking further of the nature of Christ, Watts says, "This second person, this man Christ Jesus, has the true God united to him, or dwelling in him, in a peculiar manner; that is, the man Jesus Christ is assumed by the great God, into so near and intimate a union with himself, that they are often represented as one complex person, or personal agent. The man Jesus Christ is the inferior agent or medium of the great God, who acteth whatsoever he pleases in and by the man Jesus Christ."* These views, in every important respect, are those of Unitarians; for they believe, that "the man Jesus Christ was the inferior agent or medium of the great God," that the union between them was "so near and intimate," that Christ spoke, and taught, and acted in exact conformity with the divine will, and that all he said has the same truth and authority, as if God himself had spoken. They believe, as well as Watts, that Christ was *inferior* to the Deity, and acted in all things by divine influence, light, and strength.

Attend, also, to some remarks of Watts on the

* *Faithful Inquiry*, p. 24.

Holy Spirit. After intimating, that “the Holy Spirit in the New Testament, when it speaks of things after the ascension of Christ, very generally, or for the most part, means that *power* or *influence* of the eternal spirit of God, which proceedeth from the Father,” he goes on to add,

“ If the Holy Spirit were really a true and proper person, it would be difficult to account for all these, and as many more expressions of scripture, which cannot possibly be ascribed to a proper person; and if in some places these impersonal expressions, or in other places the personal expressions, must be figurative, why may not my explication of them do as well as the contrary? And thus the spirit of God needs not *any where* be construed into a real, proper, distinct person.

“ I know not any place in scripture, which requires us to make express personal addresses, either of prayer or of praise, unto the Spirit.

“ Surely, if praises or prayers were necessary to be offered distinctly to the Holy Spirit, 'tis very strange, that of all the writers of the New Testament, not one of them should give us some hint of it in precept, instruction, or example; but neither Matthew, Mark, Luke nor John, Paul nor Peter, James nor Jude have left us any thing whence we can infer it.”*

* Ibid. p. 30, 32.

The *Faithful Inquiry* was printed during Watts's lifetime, but not published. It is said to have been suppressed at the earnest solicitation of some of his friends. Mr. Burder intimates, that it was printed without the knowledge of

Now, if there be any meaning in words, can we infer from this language, that Watts believed the Holy Spirit to be a distinct being, equal in power and duration to God the Father? On the contrary, could he express in more decided terms his disbelief of the personality of the Holy Spirit, or of the propriety of its receiving worship and praise? What kind of faith in the trinity is that, which rejects the separate personal existence, and the worship of the Holy Spirit? To call a man a Trinitarian, with such a faith, is contradictory and absurd.

Mr. Palmer, who undertook to prove, that Dr. Watts was neither in the Arian nor Socinian belief, says expressly, that he considered “Christ another being, or person, *in himself inferior to the Father, and derived from him.*” Watts in his sermons, as quoted by Palmer, also speaks of Christ as “*derived from God the Father,*” and calls him the “nearest creature to the blessed God.” As to the Holy Spirit, Palmer says, “He seems not to have held the common notion of his real personality as distinct from the Father, supposing it to mean *the divine power, or influence,* or God himself as exerting this influence.”* Now whether these views be Arian or Socinian, I will not affirm, but that they are strictly Unitarian I

the author, and that “some officious disciple of the Doctor’s procured a copy and printed it, either without his consent, or subsequent to his death.” This may be true, but it is mere conjecture, and does not affect the authenticity or value of the work. Indeed, Mr. Burder allows, that it contains very little not found in other parts of Watts’s writings. *Memoirs of Watts, prefixed to Burder’s edition of his Works, p. 37.*

* *Memoirs of Dr. Watts, Boston, 1793; Appendix, p. 91, 129.*

can say with confidence. They contain not even a shadow of a trinity in any approved acceptation of that term.

But we have yet other testimony from Dr. Watts's own mouth. In a letter to the Rev. Dr. Colman of Boston, written 1747, he speaks as follows. "I am glad my book of *Useful Questions* came safe to your hand. I think I have said every thing concerning the Son of God, which scripture says; *but I could not go so far as to say, with some of our orthodox divines, that the Son is EQUAL with the Father*; because our Lord himself expressly says, 'The Father is greater than I.'"^{**} Shall we still persist, that Dr. Watts was a Trinitarian, and that when he said the Father and Son *are not equal*, he meant directly the contrary?

If a man, who professes a belief in the simple undivided unity of God; who writes largely to prove that the Son is a distinct, derived, inferior, subordinate, dependent being; who denies the personality and separate existence of the Holy Spirit, and calls it the power, or influence, or operating agency of God, and affirms that there is no scriptural evidence for worshipping this Spirit; if such a man is to be accounted a Trinitarian, it will be vain to trust any longer to the force of language, or to look for meaning in words, or distinctions in things.

I am not attempting to exhibit a general system of

* Memoirs of Dr. Watts, Appendix, p. 19. The original of this letter I believe is retained among the files of the Massachusetts Historical Society.

Watts's theological opinions. In some respects they were peculiar, but with these peculiarities we are not now concerned. He believed in the preexistence of Christ's human soul, and that the Deity was so intimately united with him, that he might be called God, and be a proper object of worship. This notion differs in no respect from the old Arian hypothesis, except in giving a less dignified character to Christ. The Arians believed his divine nature to have preexisted, and that he was properly called God, and worshipped as such, although he was inferior to the Father. I aim not to prove, that Watts was an Arian or Socinian; I know he was neither, as those names are usually applied; but I do aim to prove that *he was not a Trinitarian in any sense whatever*, or that he did not believe in the existence of three *equal* and separate persons, beings, agents, essences, subsistences, or hypostases, in the Deity. He believed in one Supreme God; in one Lord Jesus Christ, who was not equal to the Supreme God; and in the Holy Spirit, not as a separate being, but as the acting power and influence of God. Hence I call him a Unitarian; and if a person with this mode of faith be not a Unitarian, I know not to what name he is entitled. On the testimony of Lardner, and especially on Watts's own writings as quoted above, the argument may safely rest without danger of being destroyed or weakened.

You refer to Watts's Psalms and Hymns as testifying to his Trinitarianism. They certainly contain sufficient evidence, that he was a Trinitarian when he wrote them, but we know his mind was not sta-

tionary, for he afterwards "thanked God, that he had learned to retract his former sentiments, and change them, when upon stricter search and review, they appeared less agreeable to the divine standard of faith." Now we have already seen, that this was the case in regard to the trinity; and you are doubtless not ignorant of the fact, that he was desirous long before his death of suppressing or altering parts of his Psalms and Hymns, but was prevented by circumstances wholly beyond his control.

Mr. Tomkins had very freely pointed out to him the impropriety of sanctioning with his name doxologies to the trinity, and especially to the Holy Spirit, since he had declared his belief, that the spirit was not a separate being, and that such ascriptions of praise were not authorized in scripture. In reply, Dr. Watts writes; "I freely answer, I wish some things were corrected. But the question with me is this. As I wrote them in sincerity at that time, is it not more for the edification of christians, and the glory of God, to let them stand, than to ruin the usefulness of the whole book, by correcting them now, and perhaps bring further and false suspicions on my present opinions? Besides, I might tell you, that of all the books I have written, that particular copy is not mine. I sold it for a triflē to Mr. Lawrence near thirty years ago, and his posterity make money of it to this very day, and I can scarce claim a right to make any alteration in the book, which would injure the sale of it."* And

* Memoirs of Dr. Watts, Appendix, p. 144; as quoted from Palmer.

again, he replied to Mr. Grove, who suggested alterations, that “he *should be glad to do it*, but it was out of his power, for he had parted with the copy, and the bookseller would not suffer any such alteration.”* These testimonies are enough to show why Watts should desist from an attempt to make such alterations, as his change of sentiments would seem to require. At least they are such reasons as he thought satisfactory.

It is to be remarked, that he does not defend the doxologies, but simply gives reasons, why he cannot alter them. In one part of his reply to Mr. Tomkins he does insinuate, that it is not unlawful to ascribe praises to the Spirit, although it be not strictly scriptural. Inasmuch as “the spirit of any being is sometimes used for being itself, and the spirit of God sometimes means God himself,” he supposed it lawful to address the Spirit in the character of God, or, which comes to the same thing, to address the Father under the name of Spirit. But he did not pretend, that this notion was scriptural; he made no other use of it than to diminish, as he thought, the impropriety of using the doxologies. To most understandings, however, this contrivance can seem only to increase the confusion and embarrassment. Mr. Tomkins was not satisfied with it, nor with the argument drawn from the offence, which Dr. Watts supposed might be given to some serious christians, if the hymns were altered according to his present sentiments.

* Monthly Repository, Vol. VIII, p. 770, 771.

But there is no occasion to follow this discussion. It is evident through the whole, that Watts was searching for the best reasons to quiet his mind in a case of necessity. To alter his hymns was out of his power; he regretted this misfortune, but as it was not to be remedied, he was willing to contemplate it in its most favourable aspect. The main thing to our present purpose is, that he acknowledged a desire to make alterations, and never in any shape defended the trinitarian parts of the hymns. In fact, had he believed in these parts the discussion could not have commenced.

With these short hints and quotations, I am willing to leave it to the judgment and candour of every impartial reader to decide, whether I committed a very heinous offence in placing even the "pious and heavenly minded Watts in such company," as that of Newton, Locke, Lardner, Whitby, Lindsey, and others of well known piety and excellence, and of similar theological sentiments.*

* Many particulars, respecting the opinions of Watts, may be seen in Belsham's *Memoir of Lindsey*, p. 216.—*Strictures* in the *Monthly Repository*, [Vol. VIII, pp. 683, 715, 768,] on Mr. Palmer's publication, entitled, *Dr. Watts no Socinian*.—*Christian Disciple*, Vol. II. New Series, p. 461; and Vol. III. p. 190.—*Yates's Sequel*, p. 93.—*Burder's Memoirs*, p. 30, et seqq.—The whole of the *Solemn Address to the Deity*, as contained in the *Christian Reformer*, Vol. I, p. 113.

LETTER II.

Morals of celebrated Unitarians belonging to the English Church.

SIR,

In my first letter I incidentally mentioned the names of several persons, whose lives and characters, it was thought, afforded no feeble testimony to the incorrectness of your charges of immorality and irreligion against Unitarians. I was so unfortunate, however, as to select a few names to which you have taken great exceptions. Among these you specify Clayton, Hoadly, Chillingworth, Law, Blackburne ; and your principle of selection would embrace Dr. Samuel Clarke, and all others, who were Unitarians, and at the same time belonged to the English Church. You are amazed, that any one should refer to such men as examples of morality. "I am astonished," you say, "and know not how men, whom I am compelled to consider as honest and sincere themselves, can so far suffer their zeal to triumph over their prudence, I had almost said over their moral sense, as to claim such associates." It is presumed, that all your readers, who know any thing of the characters of these persons, have been equally astonished, that your own "zeal should so far triumph over your pru-

dence," as to suffer you to arraign before your individual judgment, and condemn, with a latitude of censure amounting almost to reprobation, men, who have been universally admired for their talents, and revered for their virtues.

Since you have thus ventured, in terms the most serious, to impeach the characters of persons, who have always been considered not less an ornament to the christian profession, than worthy examples of the good influences of the unitarian faith, it becomes my duty to examine the *fact* in regard to their morals and lives, and also to inquire into the grounds of your impeachment. If, indeed, it can be made out, that these were bad men, and used religion only as a cloak for worldly and wicked purposes, as you would seem to insinuate, then it must be confessed, that the argument in favour of the moral tendency of Unitarianism is rather weakened than confirmed by appealing to their example. But if the contrary be true, and they be ascertained to have been exemplary and pious christians, it will follow, that you were mistaken, more vehement than accurate, and that the argument is sound.

As the only mode of settling the question in this shape, is by an appeal to their writings and contemporaries, it can hardly be supposed, that my limited plan will allow me to go into a full investigation. I can only touch on a few prominent particulars. They shall be such, however, as will be conclusive. The truth is, you cannot select an equal number of men of so much eminence from any period of history.

who were more distinguished for their excellence and christian virtues. Had you thrown your shafts at random, they could not have been more unfortunate in the direction they took, or the objects on which they chanced to fall. It is a fact, which you have not attempted to controvert, and which I am persuaded you will not, that these men were remarkable for their practical goodness. Why then are they loaded with charges so heavy and offensive, why so much abhorrence expressed of their very names, why are they libelled and proscribed as men, who were a disgrace to their profession, who are to be reprobated and condemned as malefactors, and whom no honest man in defence of a good cause can “claim as associates?” You answer, that in belonging to the Church of England, they subscribed to articles which they did not believe. It follows, that they were hypocrites, and their goodness a show for their own convenience and interest. As the burden of your charges rests on this point, it shall be examined with some attention.

The question is, whether these men did not obey the dictates of conscience, and conform to the decision of their judgment, in the course they pursued? If so, it would have been criminal to act differently. They are not to be judged by a rule, which any individual, not acquainted with their motives, may imagine he should prescribe to himself under similar circumstances. By this mode of judging, you would admit no man to be conscientious, or sincere, or to act rightly, till he should be guided by your rule.

You have denounced these men as hypocrites, immoral, and irreligious, on principles by which every man in the community might, in a greater or less degree, come under the same censure. When you can prove by a man's conduct, that he aims to promote selfish interests and unholy purposes by a sacrifice of every thing, which can dignify and adorn the human character, or that he disregards all the laws of right reason and of revelation, which concern him as an immortal and accountable being, you may then, and not before, discover some show of justice in such a sentence of condemnation, as you have passed upon these men. In the present case, no such proof can be exhibited. No motives can be urged, which could have induced them to dissemble. The whole tenour of their lives is a standing witness to their uprightness, and whatever may be thought of their views of subscription, it is contrary to every principle of justice and charity, of conviction and belief, to suppose that in a case of the greatest possible moment, they forsook the integrity, which had uniformly guided them in concerns of infinitely less importance.

It is well known, that very different opinions have been entertained by different persons, respecting the nature and terms of subscription. Some have contended, that the articles ought to be explicitly believed in their literal sense by the person subscribing, while others have considered them as designed to secure the peace and union of the Church, without intending to impose a belief, or a pretended be-

lief, in particular dogmas. At present it will be sufficient to hint at three general modes, in which the subject has been viewed.

First, it was a very early opinion, that the articles were intended not so much to be articles of *faith*, as of *peace*. Such was the opinion of Laud, of Sheldon, and many others of that period. Some general forms were necessary to keep the Church together, and although the framers of the articles made them express their own belief, yet the object to be attained was a unity of action, an agreement of order, a resolution and promise to submit to the authority, and support the institutions of the Church.

This was the sense in which the subject was understood by Chillingworth. He publicly professed not to subscribe the articles, as articles of faith, but of peace. To this effect he speaks in the following words; “For the Church of England I am fully persuaded, that the constant doctrine of it is so pure and orthodox, that whosoever believes it, and lives according to it, shall be saved; and that there is no error in it, which may necessitate or warrant any man to disturb the peace, or renounce the communion of it; *this, in my opinion, is all intended by subscription.*”* Here is no concealment, duplicity, nor dissembling. He tells you plainly and frankly, what he understands by subscribing; and whatever may have been his opinions in other respects, there is no room for doubting his honesty and integrity in this act.

He was first opposed to subscription from scruples

* Preface to the Author of *Charity Maintained*, Sec. 40.

of conscience, when a very advantageous preferment in the Church was offered to him ; and the letter, which he wrote to Dr. Sheldon, declining this offer, because he could not assent to the articles in the sense, which he believed them to convey, affords one of the noblest testimonies of a powerful intellect, an excellent heart, an independent spirit, a lofty integrity, and great sacrifices for the sake of conscience, which have ever appeared. Speaking of subscription, he observes in his letter, "I thank God I am now so resolved, that I shall never do that while I am living and in health, which I would not do if I were dying ; and this I am sure I would not do."* At this time he conceived, that the articles should not be subscribed, unless they were believed in their most obvious sense. A long correspondence ensued, in which Sheldon, who was afterwards archbishop, argued, that the articles were meant to be "forms of peace." The reasoning of Sheldon, strengthened by that of archbishop Laud, who was the patron of Chillingworth, produced a change in his opinions. Without pretending to discuss the grounds of this change, I would simply inquire, with what semblance of justice, or candour, can any one accuse him of treachery to his conscience in this decision, any more than in the first, when the inducement was just as strong ? In referring to this subject, the editors of the *Biographia Britannica* observe, "Whether Chillingworth's opinion upon this head were right, or

* This letter may be seen at full length in Kippis' edition of the *Biog. Brit.* Art. *Chillingworth* ; and also in the *Monthly Repository*, vol. ix. p. 3.

wrong, there can be no doubt, from the whole tenour of his life, that he acted with perfect integrity.”*

You say of him, that “he was a Protestant and Papist by turns, and at length died a Socinian, soon after having solemnly denied that he was one.” This is harsh in the extreme, and the more so, as it is incapable of being supported by a shadow of proof. The mind of Chillingworth was uncommonly inquisitive from his childhood, and his love of truth was equal to his desire of attaining knowledge. By his early intimacy with a learned Jesuit, he was induced to embrace the Catholic faith; but his mind was hardly matured, before he discovered his error, and became, during the remainder of his life, the most able, learned, and successful defender of Protestantism, that has ever engaged in the cause. This, in your language, was being a Papist and Protestant by turns. It is not true, that he was ever a Socinian. It was a slander reiterated by his enemies during his lifetime, but, like other slanders, was never substantiated. Had you ever read Chillingworth’s admirable apology for his change of opinions, I must believe you would never have injured his memory by such ill founded and ungenerous insinuations as those above. No one can contemplate his remarks without admiring his frankness, his charitable temper, his humility, his zeal for truth; nor without feeling the utmost confidence in the purity of his in-

* Biog. Brit. vol. iii. p. 518.

tentions, the sincerity of his heart, and the piety of his soul.*

The views of Clayton seem to have been nearly the same as those of Chillingworth. He was, if possible, more open in the avowal of his opinion, as appears from his eloquent speech before the Irish House of Lords, in which he defended a bill proposing alterations in the Book of Common Prayer. He argued and proved, that it was not the intention of the original act of uniformity, by which subscription was required, to *enforce a belief* in particular doctrines, but simply to demand an “unfeigned assent and consent to *the use of* all things in the said book.” Such was the language of the Act, but in the form of declaration then in use, the words here marked with italics, were omitted, thereby conveying a totally different sense, and perverting the original intention of the Act. “As there is,” says Clayton in this speech, “a wide distance between being certain of the truth, and being certain of the falsehood of some propositions, it is no way inconsistent with the strictest honesty for persons to give their assent and consent, for peace and uniformity’s sake, *to the use of*

* See Chillingworth’s *Religion of Protestants a safe Way to Salvation*. Chap. v. § 103.—chap. iv. § 16.—chap. vi. § 56.

Clarendon says of him, that “he was a man of excellent parts, and cheerful disposition; void of all kind of vice, and endued with many notable virtues; of a very public heart, and an indefatigable desire to do good.”

Some excellent remarks on the character and principles of Chillingworth, and the persecutions he received from his enemies, as well as strictures on the ravings of Cheynel respecting his last illness, death, and burial, may be seen in Hoadly’s *Letter to Dr. Snape, prefixed to Pillonniere’s Answer*. Works, vol. ii. p. 617, et seqq.

some particular forms of worship, either in doctrine or discipline, though they may not thoroughly approve of the things themselves, and to try to get them amended; while the public declaration of our assent and consent to the things themselves, ties down the mind from any further inquiry, and by discouraging all doubts and inquisitive industry, puts a stop to all improvement in knowledge, or any further reformation in religion." The same opinion he defended several years before, in a dedication to Dr. Stone, Primate of Ireland, which was prefixed to an *Essay on Spirit.*

Add to this, that Clayton was renowned through his whole life for his numerous virtues, for his amiable disposition, benevolence, disinterestedness, and indeed for all the characteristics of a pious and good man; that he was persecuted for his opinions, and suffered much from the reproaches and the ill treatment of the world,—add these things, and then ask yourself, what possible reason can be devised for supposing him to have been actuated by any other than conscientious, honest, and pure motives? He did not need, nor covet, the emoluments of the Church, for he possessed an ample fortune, and was known frequently to bestow more in offices of charity, than the whole amount of his ecclesiastical stipends. Instead of a lavish bounty of censure, therefore, a true christian spirit would find much to commend and admire in the virtues of such a man.*

* The following anecdote is illustrative of the character of Clayton. While on a visit to London, a person of respectable appearance called on him

Secondly, the articles have been considered as requiring subscription in that sense, which the subscriber believes to be consistent with scripture. This opinion was adopted and defended by Dr. Samuel Clarke. It is in conformity with the protestant principle of taking the Scriptures as our only guide. No one can adhere to this principle in assenting to forms of human composition, unless he receives them in that sense only, which he believes the Scriptures to convey, and as affording such interpretations of the Scriptures, as are consistent with the meaning he attaches to them. Hence, whatever form of words any one may be called to subscribe, for religious purposes, he is bound to receive them *in that sense*, in which they can be made consistent expositions of scripture, and in no other. Dr. Clarke declares this to have been the principle by which he was guided, in respect to the trinity. "I desire it may be observed," he says, "that my assent to the use of the forms by law appointed, and to all words of human

to ask charity. Suspecting imposition, he at first declined, but when the name of Dr. Clarke was incidentally mentioned by the person, Clayton told him, if he would obtain a certificate from Dr. Clarke, respecting the necessity of his circumstances, he would afford him aid. A certificate was produced, and without further inquiry, he gave him three hundred pounds, which sum was abundantly sufficient to relieve him from all his embarrassments.

Hearing of this noble act of benevolence, Dr. Clarke sought the acquaintance of Clayton, and introduced him to the Queen, who was so much delighted with the simplicity of his manners, the gentleness of his disposition, his benevolent and charitable spirit, that she immediately provided for his being appointed to the first vacant bishopric in Ireland. It hence appears, that the sole cause of his preferment was the excellence of his character, for it was long after this period, that he attained the celebrity to which he was raised by his learning and talents. *Biog. Brit. vol. iii. p. 621.*

institution, is given only *in that sense*, wherein they are, according to the explication given in the several parts of this book, [Scripture Doctrine of the Trinity,] agreeable to that which appears to me, upon the most careful and serious consideration of the whole matter, to be the doctrine of scripture ; and *not in that sense*, which the popish schoolmen, affecting, for the sake of *transubstantiation*, to make every thing look like a contradiction, endeavoured to introduce into the church.”* Will you say, that Dr. Clarke was not sincere in this declaration, that he was seeking for a subterfuge, that he cherished self delusion, and aimed to deceive the world, that he rashly and foolishly hazarded the safety of his soul, by defying the vengeance of a holy and heart searching God ? You must either sustain these positions, or allow his purposes to have been good, and his conduct innocent.†

It is the same with him, as in the examples of Chillingworth and Clayton. You have no other criterion of judging, than the character which he sustained through life ; and it may be doubted if history have recorded one more worthy or unexceptionable. The strength of his religious affections, and the high and uniform tone of his morals, which his writings display, and which no one has attempted to

* Introduction to the *Scripture Doctrine of the Trinity*, p. 33.

† Bishop Pearson seems to have had the same opinion as Dr. Clarke. Speaking of the Creed, he says, “ I observe that whatsoever is delivered in the Creed, we *therefore* believe, *because* it is contained in the Scriptures ; and consequently must *so* believe it as it is contained there.” *Exposition of the Creed*, 4th edit. p. 227.

disparage, are well expressed in the following language of his biographer. “ His piety was manly and unaffected, built upon the most solid grounds, and free from all pomp and show. The charity of his temper and good will was as extensive as the whole rational creation of God. The love of the religious and civil liberties of mankind was a ruling and powerful principle in his heart and practice. In a word, his morals, from the first of his days to the last, were without reproach. There was an innocence and inoffensiveness remarkable through his whole behaviour, and his life, when he came into the view of the great world, was an ornament and strength to that religion, which his pen so well defended.”*

A *third* mode of considering the articles is, that they ought to be received according to the intention of the legislature, by which they were originally imposed. This view is supported by Paley.† He reasons, that it was not the original intention to make every man believe in each separate proposition, as such a thing is plainly impossible. The articles involve the most intricate subjects of metaphysical controversy, in which no two men were ever in all respects agreed. It was intended to exclude persons inclined to popery, anabaptists, puritans, and all oth-

* Hoadly’s *Life of Clarke*, Works, vol. iii. p. 468.

For a high eulogy on the virtues and piety of Dr. Clarke, see Bishop *Hare’s Works*, vol. ii. p. 23. Lond. 1746. It was a saying of the parishioners of Dr. Clarke,—“ However we differ from him in some matters, we desire to see no other person in the pulpit.”

† Moral Philosophy, book iii. part 1, chap. 22.

ers opposed to the episcopal establishment. Any person embraced within this list, Dr. Paley thinks ought not to subscribe at all; but any one not thus embraced may subscribe without giving credence to every article, provided he is convinced, that he complies strictly with the intention of the legislature.

Now I am very far from defending these modes of regarding the articles; nor does it come within my province to enter upon their merits. It is enough to bring into view the facts stated above to show, that the persons, whom you have censured with so much freedom, had reasons for their conduct, and such reasons as have been approved and acted upon by wise and good men of all parties. I do not assert the truth of their opinions, nor plead for their infallibility, but for their integrity, their conviction, and righteous motives. I infer these from the unimpeachable character of their lives, from their multiplied deeds of piety and goodness, and from their own declarations respecting their views of the nature and object of subscription. In screening them from your charges, I impose no tax on the indulgence of any person; I demand the exercise of common justice.

It is not important to investigate the particular motives of all the persons, whom your rule would include. Their precise opinions respecting subscription may not always be so accurately known, as in the examples above cited. But the argument holds good in all cases, that they ought to be considered honest in this particular, when they were known to

be so in every thing else ; and that whatever they thought of the mode, they were conscientious in the thing itself. If you deny this, you must deny, that character has any dependence on actions, and affirm, that men are to be accounted moral or immoral, according to the fancy or caprice of any one, who may choose to sit in judgment.

In regard to Hoadly, whoever doubts his integrity in any course he pursued, I would advise him to read his sermons on *Christian Moderation*, on *Judging one another*, and on *Persecution*. In these sermons may be seen the high principles of rectitude, of moral dignity, and of religious freedom, which influenced his opinions, and regulated his practice. In these may also be seen the deep responsibility under which he felt to his Maker, and the love and good will, which he cherished for all men. If a man's writings from the beginning to the end of a long life, are to be taken as any test of his principles and character, no one can be entitled to a fairer fame than Hoadly. He was an advocate, and a powerful advocate, for civil and religious liberty. His sermon before the king, on the *Kingdom of Christ*, which was the commencement of the famous Bangorian controversy, was wholly occupied in defending the great protestant principle of the right of private judgment, and perfect freedom of thought in religion. These were themes of which he was never weary. The purity of his morals was equal to his singleness of heart, and love of independence. Although he was attacked with much violence

from every quarter, and compelled to make many replies, and meet many heavy charges, it was said of him at the time, and it is not likely to be controverted at the present day, that “the enemies of religious liberty had not been able to fix any disgrace on the unspotted character of the most excellent bishop.”*

The case of Blackburne is more in point, than any I have noticed. He refused preferment, because he would not again subscribe. He was intimate with Lindsey, Disney, and others of the unitarian belief, and when Dr. Chandler died, the congregation at the old Jewry, in London, knowing Blackburne’s views concerning the established Church, took pains to ascertain whether, if chosen, he would become their pastor. He declined, notwithstanding his income would be three times as large as the one he then received. “His continuance in the church,” says Dr. Rees, “cannot be justly ascribed to any selfish and interested motives, because he might have left it with advantage, and he remained in it with a fixed purpose of accepting no preferment; and he refused very considerable offers of this kind.” In his very able and admirable work, *The Confessional*, he opposes the notion in all its shapes, that the articles could properly be subscribed without believing them

* See *An Account of the Bangorian Controversy*, drawn up by a person thoroughly acquainted with the subject, and with the character of Hoadly, and printed in the later editions of Hoadly’s Works.

in their literal acceptation.* After having subscribed, he remained in the Church, but refused advancement on the condition of further subscription, and declined the most liberal offers out of the Church, which he might have accepted without subscribing. How is this conduct to be explained by your principles of hypocrisy and selfishness? How is it to be explained in any way, except by supposing the man to have yielded to a rigid sense of duty, and to have sacrificed the prospects of wordly gain and preferment to his religious scruples, and peace of conscience?

Such are the men, whom you charge with the grossest immorality, and say in a late work, if they were Unitarians, "they have lived in habits of the most shameful dishonesty and perjury; a dishonesty and perjury, which, if known, could not fail of rendering them, in the eyes of all upright men, a disgrace to any society calling itself a church of Christ." I will not trust myself to remark on such language as this, but leave every reader to make his own reflections.

I am not disposed to assume for these men the same merit for independence, as I would for Robertson, Lindsey, Disney, Jebb, Whiston,† and others,

* See *Confessional*, second edit. p. 202. Also, Ridley's *Three Letters to the Author of the Confessional*. Letter Third.

† Soon after the accession of the Hanover family, it was intimated to Whiston by Sir Joseph Jekyl, that it might be agreeable to the ruling party to make him a bishop, if he were disposed to accept of preferment. Whiston answered immediately; "I would not sign the Thirty Nine Articles to be made archbishop of Canterbury." *Whiston's Memoirs*, Vol. I. p. 168.

who left the Church. Nor do I think this necessary to vindicate their characters from such allegations, as you have made. No one has any reason to question their motives. They were virtuous and pious men. Some of them remained in the Church against their interest, and frankly declared to the world in what light they regarded subscription. From these premises, which are thoroughly established, I maintain the inference to be legitimate and conclusive, that they were honest and sincere. Robertson and Lindsey continued several years in the Church after they became Unitarians, and this, as they tell you, with a clear conscience, and under a sense of duty. No one, I apprehend, will have the hardihood to accuse them of "dishonesty and perjury," or of prevaricating and dissembling. There is a christian virtue, called charity, which, as practised by the Saviour and the primitive christians, should teach us to think favourably of our brethren.

Trace your principle farther. It operates with just as much rigour on other persons belonging to the Church, as on Unitarians. In truth, it reaches to every individual, who subscribes the articles. Do you believe any person to have subscribed, who gave credence literally to every proposition in every article? Does not each one modify many parts, in accordance with what he conceives to be the meaning of scripture? And among episcopalians, are there not all shades and gradations of theological opinions? This is not to be denied. But do you suppose the articles *literally* teach all religious opinions? Do

they teach Arminianism to some, and Calvinism to others? Did they teach Jeremy Taylor to write against original sin and predestination, which are two of the most conspicuous doctrines of the articles? Did they teach the bishop of Lincoln to defend the doctrine of universal redemption, and Scott, and his Calvinistic brethren, to restrict the possibility of salvation to the elect? Did they teach Wallis and South to find only a trinity of modes in the Deity, and Sherlock to discover, that the Divinity consists of three beings, as distinct as three men? When all these questions can be answered in the affirmative; that is, when innumerable contradictions can be reconciled, it may then be proved, that all others besides Unitarians have concurred in receiving the articles in their literal sense. It may then be proved, also, and not before, that Unitarians, belonging to the Church, have been more dishonest than other episcopalians, and that all, indiscriminately, who have subscribed the articles, were guilty of "dishonesty and perjury."

Once more. Let the principle be carried into your own church. When a candidate is licensed to preach, he is required, by the Form of Government of the Presbyterian Church, to answer the following question in the affirmative. "Do you sincerely receive and adopt the Confession of Faith of this church, as containing the system of doctrine taught in the holy Scriptures?"* This declaration, so far

* Form of Government in the Presbyterian Church. Chap. xiii. Section 5.

as faith is concerned, amounts to precisely the same thing as subscription in the Episcopal Church. It binds the candidate to receive the Confession of Faith as the rule of his opinions.

Now this formulary is in the highest tone of Calvinism. What shall we say, when we find Presbyterians, who have solemnly made this declaration, afterwards denying their belief of several articles in the Confession of Faith? Is it not a fact, that more than one fifth of the Presbyterian General Assembly are Hopkinsians? Is it not true, that some of them, I will not undertake to say how many, are inclining to Arminianism? Is it not true, that some, who call themselves the “stricter sort,” say as little as possible of that vital doctrine of Calvinism, denominated, in the Confession of Faith, “God’s Eternal Decree?” How are these things to be reconciled? Shall we cut the matter short, and deplore such lamentable instances of “dishonesty and perjury?” No. Let us put on the garments of humility and of charity; let each one remove the beam from his own eye, and study the imperfection of his own heart. Let him first scrutinize and judge himself. He will then be better prepared to enumerate the faults, reprobate the motives, and disparage the character of his brethren. Nay, rather, it is hoped he will be better prepared for aiding the progress of christian truth, and for establishing the Redeemer’s kingdom, the kingdom of piety and goodness, in the hearts and lives of men.

I have thus finished what I proposed to say con-

cerning the tenets and morals of several distinguished Unitarians, whose practice you have represented as at variance with their faith. If a life of uniform integrity, rectitude, and piety can have any claims on our respect; if the moral and religious character of these men is to be judged by the common rules of judging in similar cases; if the tenour of their writings, and the voice of cotemporaries, may be allowed to speak in their behalf; we shall look in vain among the orthodox, or among any class of men, for brighter examples of the pure influence of scriptural christianity. We can do them no greater injustice, than to listen to the charge, which you have ventured to prefer against them.

In the preceding letters, some of the more prominent features only of calvinistic orthodoxy have been drawn. To these we must be contented to limit the present discussion. There would be no end to the labour of exposing the irrational principles, and tracing out the evil consequences of this system. Its foundation is laid deep in the mysteries of perverted metaphysics, and its ramifications carry its dismal influence to the best powers of the mind, and the best affections of the heart. To behold Calvinism in its true colours, it would be necessary to pursue its force and tendency as connected with the elements of natural religion, the purposes of the christian dispensation, the axioms of practical ethics, the circle of social intercourse, and, in short, all that pertains, either in thought or action, to the duties of piety and benevolence. We should then perceive a scheme, indebted

for its existence to the workings of a wayward imagination in the dark ages of the world, and engrafted by a most unnatural alliance into the sublime system of reason and truth, which is written by the finger of God in the hearts of men, and made more bright and certain by the revelation, the death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We should be lost in a labyrinth of dreams and shadows, contradiction and error.

THE END.

ERRATA.

- Page 76, l. 13, for "nature" read "stature."
96, l. 1 and 14, for "Hemming" read "Fleming."
134, l. 16, for "Trinity" read "Triunity."
161, l. 4, for "hear" read "bear."
161, l. 2 from bottom, for "Section." read "*Lection.*"
203, l. 4 from bottom, for "degree" read "decree."
292, l. 17, for "of" read "or."
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